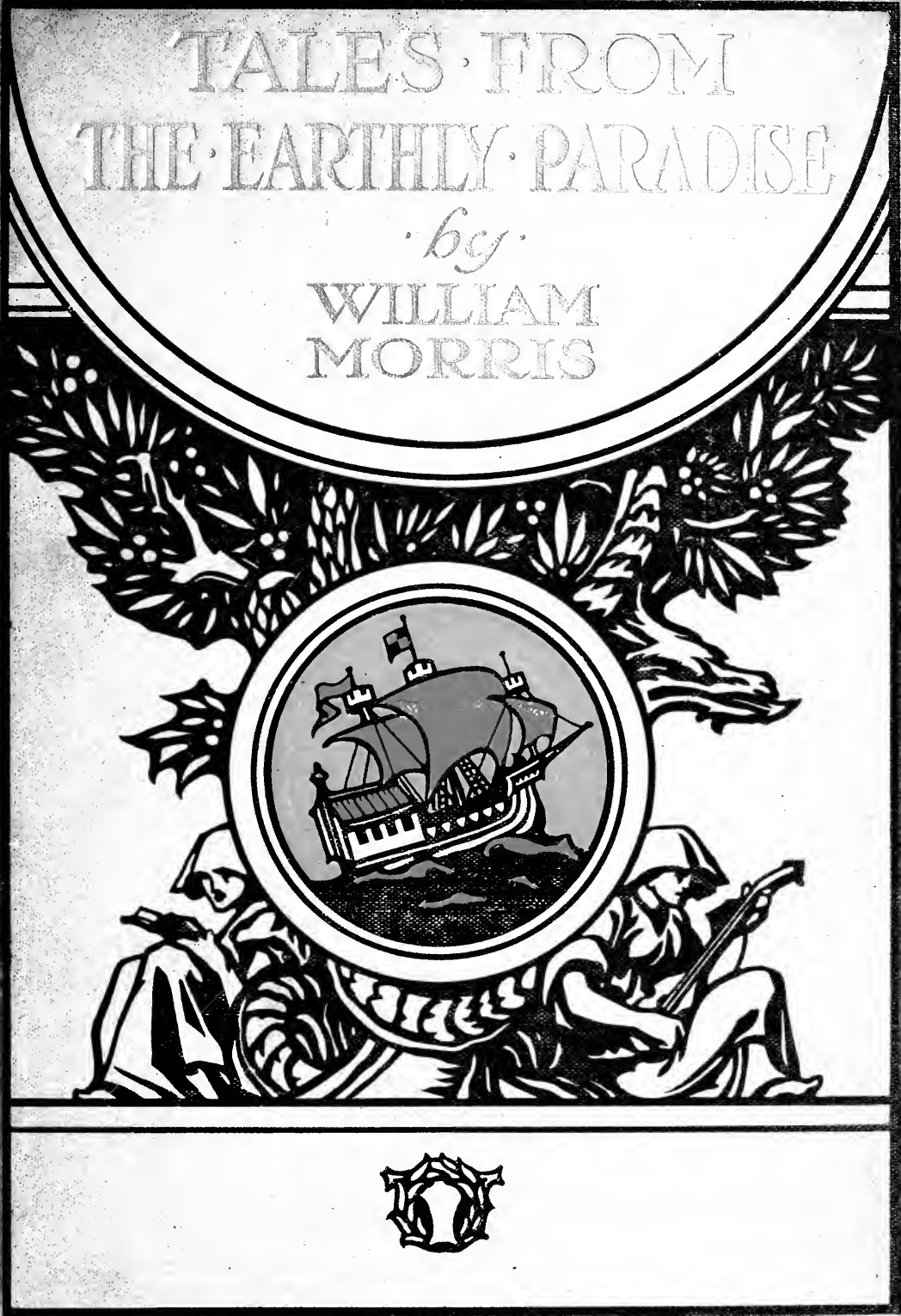
TALES FROM THE EARTHLY PARADISE

by

WILLIAM MORRIS



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THE FAIRIES' GIFTS

What man is this [illegible] and worn and old can smile in his coming death? *Page* [illegible]

TALES FROM THE EARTHLY PARADISE

BY

WILLIAM MORRIS

SELECTED AND ARRANGED IN PROSE BY

W. J. GLOVER

WITH TWELVE FULL-PAGE ILLUSTRATIONS IN COLOUR FROM DRAWINGS BY

ISABEL BONUS

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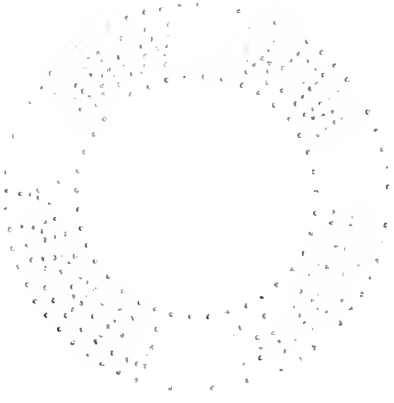

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PREFACE

The Earthly Paradise was written by William Morris in 1868–1870. It is a treasure-house of lovely old-world tales, mainly Greek and Northern, told in a series of narrative poems arranged not unlike Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales.* A company of seafarers who had failed to find the Earthly Paradise, their heart's desire, are thrown on an island in the West inhabited by a colony of Greeks, as told in the Prologue. Here they are kindly received by the islanders, and for a year twice a month at feast time a tale of old is told in turn by the Greeks and the Norwegians. From these twenty-four stories twelve have been selected and here rendered for children, largely in Morris' own words, and, it is hoped, in such a way that later they will turn with interest to *The Earthly Paradise*, the work of a distinguished poet.

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TALES FROM THE EARTHLY PARADISE

PROLOGUE: THE WANDERERS

SCENE.—*A nameless city in a distant sea thronged with people clad in ancient guise; a council house,—within, the city rulers sitting on thrones of gold; below them, a group of soldiers and peasants gathered round a little band of wanderers shrivelled, bent, and grey.*

Chief Ruler. "From what unheard-of world and in what strange ship have ye come hither to us? We are no barbarous folk, but learned in memories of a long past day, speaking the ancient tongue of Greece. Speak out therefore and fear not. If ye need a place wherein to pass away the end of life, that ye shall have from us, unless ye are enemies of God."

The Wanderer. "Masters, I have to tell a tale of woe, a tale of folly and of wasted life. Wonder not that I, a Northman, know your tongue, since I was born and lived awhile among the Greeks ere I went to Norway to my kin. While among them I gathered much lore of their gods and heroes, and again in Norway heard I ceaseless stories of the god Odin that moved me more than words can say, so that when I reached my uncle's dwelling and saw the land scanty and bare, it seemed so little and unworthy, and more and more I dreamed of Asgard, the home of ancient faith.

"Within our house there lived a Breton squire named Nicholas, well-learned in the old tales of many lands. For one tale I told, he told me two; he spoke of gardens ever blossoming across the western sea, where none grew old. In short, he said so much of this and that, that soon the empty stories seemed to me real life, and daily life an empty dream.

"Then there was another man, Laurence, a German priest, who still strove to find the precious draught whereby men live midst mortal men, yet never die. Listening to him I thought it a certain thing that in some hidden vale this Earthly Paradise was to be found.

"At last, one bright September afternoon, Nicholas spoke. 'How long shall we abide in this plague-stricken land? Fair fellows, will ye come with me and try to find our long-desired quest? Beneath my bed I have an iron chest that holdeth my savings hoarded for this end, and further, there is a fair long ship, well provisioned, ready even now for sea, that I may say belongeth unto me, for its owner hath no more need of it. Therefore my gold shall buy us swords and wine as we go oceanwards. What say ye, will ye go with me to-night?'

"Then said the German priest, 'Let us now take hands and swear to follow evermore this quest.' So with joined hands we swore, and Nicholas said, 'To-night, fair friends, be ye ready to leave this land, bring all the arms ye can and such men as ye can trust.'

"Each went his way, and I, for the rest of the day, gained three men that I deemed true to join us. Then hours went past, till at midnight, armed from head to heel, I stole down to the open postern gate, bearing small wealth—this sword that now hangs here worn thin and narrow, my father's axe, and some few gems in my pouch. By the gate stood Laurence, all armed; and my three men were standing not

far off with a small store of arms and furs and raiment.

"Greeting my new mates quietly, we made haste to reach the hill where stood Nicholas the Breton and with him about twenty men. Swiftly we set out for the beach and boarded our ship, the *Fighting Man*. The long oars swept out, sails were hoisted, and in a light wind we sailed away.

"Then Nicholas came to Laurence and me to talk over what he deemed our course should be. 'When we have passed the French and English Strait,' he said, 'we shall seek news of that land of immortality and blessed rest, and since the *Fighting Man* is over small to hold the mighty stores we shall need, let us turn in first to Bremen and there buy a new keel with my gold, and thou, Rolf, shall be her lord.'

"So on a Sunday morn we entered Bremen and bought our new ship, the *Rose Garland*, and stored her with food, arms, and raiment. Then we set sail again in our two ships with good hope in a fair wind for ten days, but no signs of land did we see on either hand.

"Then a tempest broke upon us and for three days we lived in fear lest some climbing sea should end us. But the gale ceased, and the

sun rose again in a cloudless sky, and from the east the wind blew cheerily. We steered south-west and one day as I lay near the mast I heard a shout, and, turning, could see one of the sailors hurrying towards me with something in his hand —a mass of brown seaweed that I knew to have seen in the sandy bays of Norway, and at eve we saw shore birds. All were glad. I slept not at all that night but walked the deck singing snatches of song, for next morn I thought to be set in my godless fair eternity, my Earthly Paradise.

"Next morning we saw more weed, more birds, but still no land. But as I stood in the good ship's stern gazing down into the sea, I saw a piece of rough-hewn wood on a wave's crest, and loudly I cried, 'Drift-wood, drift-wood!' and one man standing by my side, mad with joy, climbed to the top of the mast to look on his new home. Yet our German priest spoke to us a word of warning. 'O friends,' he said, 'right welcome is the land that lies ahead, but I warn you not to shout. Think what may dwell there! Call to mind the tale we heard last winter when that Genoese told us of the island in the outer seas that he and his companions reached. All were slain but him, who managed

to swim off to his ship. Mayhap men dwell here too, who worship dreadful gods and sacrifice poor travellers to them.'

"Well, the next morn we came unto our land, and our wildest dreams seemed coming true. Had we found the Earthly Paradise? Alas, the happy day, the foolish day! We pulled ashore; I was the first to land, and ran to the flowers and cried aloud with joy. Following up a winding path that crossed a thicket full of many-coloured birds and green lizards, we came to a great hill. The beaten path we followed led us round it to a soft and grassy slope, and there it forked, one arm led up the hill, another wound through the forest. We took the first, but two-thirds up the hill we reached a level space where stood a rough shrine of unhewn stones with a great heap of bones piled up outside it.

"There awhile we stood in doubt, till Brother Laurence entered the shrine alone, and presently called to me from the inside to follow, so tremblingly I went in and others came after. There amidst the gloom, by peering steadily, we could see an altar of rough stones, and over it sat a god of yellow metal which Laurence said was of gold. Against the wall there hung

men's bodies, brown and dry, wrapped about with gaudy rags, and their heads were wreathed with golden chaplets.

"We soon passed from that house of death, trembling and pale, and got away in haste, knowing the land of immortality that we sought was not there, but that perchance these men might have died in seeking it.

"We set ourselves to win the top of the mountain. On either hand was forest, till at last we espied, some four leagues off, a space cleared of trees, and in that open place we seemed to see houses and rising smoke that told of unknown, unseen folk.

"By daybreak we were there, and found houses framed of trees, and four-footed tame beasts. Soon a man came out from the first house, and with a startled shout took to his heels, then from far and near the folk swarmed out, gave us no second look, but ran their best. We speedily entered their houses and found a few feeble folk, though most had fled. To these we made our meaning clear, and sent an old man into the wood to tell his fellows that we were friends. Two or three, the boldest of the little company, came back with him, and they in turn, by signs, learnt that we meant them no harm,

so at last all fear was laid aside and they thronged round us.

"One, clad in strange glittering attire with a golden sun upon his breast, came and let us know our coming made him glad and bade us follow him. Through close streets he led us to a shapely hall, round and high-roofed, held up with tall tree-trunks, where amidst his lords he sat, a barbarous king, gold-crowned, in strange apparel rich and fair, at which we shuddered, for he was clad like those we saw hanging dead in the dismal shrine. He bade us sit and eat and drink.

"Now when we tried to ask the way to that good land we sought, they pointed eastward and seaward, though I know not if they knew what we were asking. Then some of them signed that they would go and be our fellows on the perilous green sea, so next morn they gave us ten and wept at our departing.

"We put to sea, intending as before to coast with watchful eyes the unknown shore. Three days we sailed, then anchoring we went ashore and found the land far better than the first. By midnight we were all asleep in our tents. Suddenly I awoke and heard shrieks and shouts of fighting. I snatched up my axe and hurried

from my tent just as a spear flew over my head. I ran to the captain and saw my fellows standing in desperate need beset with foes who turned upon us with a hideous yell, but we were desperate and fresh and dangerous, and with our axes fought so, that they were driven back a pace. Then gathering all together, side by side we laid our weapons and rushed upon them. They fled from our levelled points, though some were slain.

" We held our hands then nor followed them in their flight, but lit our watch-fires and looked round for the wounded. We found ten, among whom was Nicholas, and three good men slain. Taking counsel we thought it best to gather up our goods and get away to the ship, carrying our wounded with us.

" So on we sailed for another weary week, and no nearer did we come to our blissful home. On the tenth day once more we took the land and pitched our camp beside a little stream, fortified it with wall and dyke, and then explored the country. We found the people most untaught and wild, but harmless, good, and gentle. We stayed with them for a time in dreary weather and built them huts, and they in turn would bring us wild fruits, catch us fish, and show us how to take the smaller beasts. But day by

day we yearned to cross the mountains where, they told us, lived men like the gods and clad as we, who doubtless lived on through eternity.

"'Who will come with me over the mountains?' I asked. 'Let us not linger here. If but twenty men will follow me, the summit of these mountains will I see or die; nor will I stay if ten will share my fate. Ay, friends, alone will I seek for my Paradise!' Most wished to go, but there were a few who said, 'Nay, let us live on here and labour till we die. Leave us, but ye may yet come back again when ye have found your trouble vain.'

"Well, in three days we left those few men behind among the simple folk and set out for the green hills. At last, when all our food was gone and some of us had died with cold and weariness, we came in sight of what we hungered for,—what then?—a savage land with folk the worst of all we came to know, scarce like men, yea, more like beasts, for they made their feasts from slain men. What time we spent there I do not know. With thirst and hunger and wretchedness we struggled daily, till we had once more clambered over the mountain and come again to our untaught friends and those we had left.

"Talking over what was best to do, we, the

leaders, were fain to go on in our search from sea to sea, and take what God might send. Those who had stayed behind said that they once before had been bereft of friends and country, and that this their life did not seem evil, so they would remain where they were. Others said that whatever happened they would seek again their happy home in Norway. So when all things had been planned we rigged our ships, and in a little while the *Fighting Man* was on its way back to Norway, and the *Rose Garland* sailed on in the quest for the Earthly Paradise."

Chief Ruler. "Sirs, by my thinking, had ye still gone on when ye had crossed the mountains, ye had come unto another sea at last and there found well-learned folk and great and fair cities, though not the deathless country of your search."

The Wanderer. "Yea, sirs, but certainly we saw nothing save these savage people. Now let me hasten to the end.

"God sent fair wind and lovely weather to us deserted men, who numbered now but two score. We stood off from the shore, still stretching southward till we lost land again. Months went by, our leaky ship rolled along the water until one

day we came to land, and found a people who spoke a tongue well-nigh the same as our own forest people used. Battered as we were, grown old, in worn-out gear, these people brought us garlands of flowers and fruits and worshipped us as gods, and would not cease for any words that we could say.

" For many a year we dwelt with them, and they treated us like kings. We had noble houses with walls and towers and lovely gardens cooled with running streams. Then,—was I the first who thought of it ?—perchance I was, but wistfully again we sought tidings of the paradise of eternal youth.

" I asked the wandering merchant, the hunter, the fisher in the rivers near the sea ; I pored over long stories lent me by the priests. Then, one day, a young man strange to the place came to me, who swearing me first to secrecy began to tell me of the hoped-for land. I saw not the trap, but listened with beating heart and whirling brain.

" ' O godlike Eastern man,' he said to me, ' believest thou that I who look so young and ruddy now, am very old ? I come to seek thee, to lead thee to our home of eternal youth. If thou dost not believe, come with me now, for near

this spot, left behind, dwelleth my younger brother, an ancient man, grey-headed, weak and wan as I am fresh.'

"Easily I fell into the snare, for as we went along the well-known streets we met an old white-haired man, weak and bent, whom the young man greeted as his brother.

"Telling this to my fellows, we quickly had all things in order, and in twelve days were following him on the sea, sailing northwards, till we sighted land. The marble quays were crowded with folk as we landed, who led us through many streets, and nowhere did we see any maimed or poor or old. All were young, and clad in silk and gold.

"Through market-place and square we went till we came to a temple, and there we entered through a brazen gate. The people brought us vestments and bade us put them on in place of our own raiment, which we did, and fair damsels took our armour from us.

"Alas, sirs, words are weak to tell of it. We found too late we had been trapped. A trumpet sounded, and we sprang to our feet. Too late! too late! for through all the doors streamed armed men, and when they were still, a fearful sight met our eyes,—*old men and grey* stood

between the bands of soldiers, and at their head moved the old man and the false guide—*father* and *son*!

"They had trapped us in the belief that we should bring good fortune upon their land while we remained in it.

"The dreary days went by in a dull round of misery, no hope shone through our prison wall that was guarded carefully day and night. Then one eve we heard the noise of battle outside, and the night sky showed a red blaze. This lasted through two days, but on the third, our guards were whispering, pale-faced, as though they feared some coming evil, and when the din increased about noon, they left us,—free! Seizing our armour we fled to the sea, and there against the quays were five tall ships lying at anchor. We hastily seized the nearest and set sail. Ah! with what joy we sniffed the fresh salt sea!

"My tale grows near its ending. We sailed southward but slowly, for our ship went heavily. Then there died our Captain Nicholas, whom I loved most of all men. After a time a wind arose, which blowing furiously drove us helpless to the open sea. For eight days it blew a gale, and when it fell, we lay leaky, dismasted, a prey to winds and waves, and with little food. With

hard toil we rigged up a feeble sail and staggered on for ten days more, when one morn we rejoiced in the sight of land.

"What more? We soon stood in this your peaceful and delightful island, amongst simple, kindly country-folk, speaking a language that I knew, who brought us to you here. And now, sirs, ye have heard all our wanderings and all our story. Here hath ending our foolish quest. Sirs, we are old and grey before our time; in what coin shall we pay for this your goodness? We can only pay you back as good men pay back God—with love."

The Ruler. "Sirs, let us go, that we may show you your new abode, and tell you what your life henceforth may be,—but poor to that ye hoped to find.

"Dear guests, the year begins to-day, and before it pass away we are eager to hear some tales of that now altered world ye come from; and perchance ye would willingly hear stories of the land wherein stand the tombs of our forefathers. Henceforth two solemn feasts shall be held in every month, at which some story shall be told, and on this day indeed shall one begin."

I

THE LAND EAST OF THE SUN, AND WEST OF THE MOON

I

In Norway, in days of old, there lived a farmer, and three fair sons this goodman had. Two were stout and strong to drive the plough, pen the sheep, and garner in the corn; but slothful was the youngest son, a "loiterer" his father called him, a "do-nought." In winter he would sit by the fireside; in summer heat he went to and fro about the garden, plucking the flowers from bough and stalk, muttering oft as he walked old rhymes that few men understood. "He is neither harm nor good," his father said; "let him go and do what pleases him."

Now it chanced that the farmer had a meadow, the delight of his eye, for the grass was so sweet and days were drawing nigh to the hay-harvest. As he walked there one day he fell to thinking, "Given a fair east wind and a cloudless sky,

we shall have it all cut before two days are passed."

But when he reached the fence and looked across his meadow, his broad face drew into a frown. For there he saw a full third of the ripening grass all trodden down, so that no scythe could pass through it. In a rage he turned and went away.

That evening, when he sat at home and his two eldest sons had come back from the fields, he said, "My sons, there has been great wrong done to me; there are ill-doers about." Then turning to the eldest, he went on: "Therefore, son, you shall go, armed with your strong cross-bow, and hide among the whitethorn bushes, and lie there all this night awake. Watch the great south meadow well, because there last night some thief thought fit to tread my ripening grass."

Unwillingly the eldest son arose, tied round his waist the case of bolts, took down the mighty cross-bow, set a strong knife in his belt, and went his way. Coming to the meadow, he lay closely hidden in the hawthorn bushes. For a little time he kept awake, but soon he fell fast asleep, sleeping as softly on the sorrel as on his own wooden bed in the loft. Nor did he wake till the sun was

high in the heavens. Then looking sleepily over the meadow, he saw yet more of that fair field trodden down.

With downcast head, he turned homewards. He spoke but little that evening in answer to his father's scoff.

That same night the angry farmer sent his second son to watch. But before the moon was down he too was asleep. Waking at the dawn, he could see the meadow had been still more trodden. When he came to the house, speaking no word for shame, the farmer rated him soundly and called both him and his elder brother "sleepy-headed fools."

The third son, John, who was lying idly by, at these words turned round, and yawned and stretched, and said, "All my rest is gone, I think, for now you will be sending me, father, to watch. Well, keep your heart up; I shall know to-morrow what thing grieves you so."

"You!" cried his father scornfully. "*You* do not think to win the game, surely, when these two have failed! You have done nothing yet to earn your keep; but go if you will, you can do me no harm, and if you should do good then I will give you a bag full of silver pennies for your own."

John said not a word, but turned away and slept soundly all day underneath the trees. When the moon came up he arose. He took no weapons with him, for he thought, "If there are evil-doers they will certainly slay me; whereas very probably I shall not see men-folk at all but fairies, and all the arms in the world would not help me to deal with these."

When he came to the meadow he looked round cautiously for a hiding-place among the bushes. There he lay and watched all through the night, but saw nothing. Then the moon sank, the stars grew pale, and the first cold light of dawn showed in the sky. A light wind rose, and suddenly a thrush began to sing, and one by one about him woke the birds.

Just then John felt a drowsiness coming on; nothing seemed so good as sleep, sweet dreams soon were creeping o'er his eyes. But in the midst of one of these he started up, for through the trees he heard a rushing sound like the wings of many birds. Bending aside the hawthorn twigs, he saw seven white swans on wide wings circling round till one by one they dropped upon the dewy grass. He thought at first he would shout and scare them off, but instead he kept hidden, and watched them bridle and preen

their snowy feathers. They came so near that he could have cast a stone over the farthest one.

The summer day came on, though the sun lingered. Nearer drew the swans, peering about in strange fashion. Then a cloud seemed to dull the place, and the birds were silent. When he next looked over the grass, seven swan-skins lay near his hand, and close by stood seven fairy maidens. Their feet moved lightly through the long seeded grass and came within two yards from where he was. There they stood, and began to talk sweetly and low.

One of the fairies was standing with her face turned away from John, but he could hear the sweet notes of her voice, which made the birds' song seem tuneless noise. Soon across the long grey dawn the first ray of the climbing sun flamed out, and silent she stood awhile, then turned, and John saw the loveliness of the fairy maiden.

He put the thorny twigs apart, and there close to his feet lay the snowy swan-skin which she had cast down. "If I take this snow-white thing, she cannot go back to her fairy realms without speaking at least one word to me," he thought.

Thus thinking, his hand fell upon the skin almost without his knowing it. He drew it to him, and there lay until the dance had died away, when their scarce-heard murmuring wholly stopped, and softly the fairies passed in long line unto the thorn bushes.

Then a sudden sharp cry pierced his ear. His fairy love was standing shaken with sobs, her slim hands covering up her face. Round her, with long caressing necks of snow and ruffling plumes, the others stood, bird-like again. Closer they pressed around her, as though loath to bid her farewell. Then one by one they left and rose into the air with clanging cries, and circled wide above her, till the blue sky hid their soaring wings and all were gone.

The fairy maiden stood there alone for a little space and did not move. The field-mouse passed close to her feet; the dragon-fly, like a thin blue needle, flickered by; and the bee whirled past her as the morn grew later. She raised her head at last, and gazing round, she said, "Is love all dead on earth?" She stopped and trembled, for she heard the hawthorn bush beside her move. She heard the parting of rustling twigs, and then a breathless cry and eager footsteps drawing nigh.

With streaming hair the fairy fled across the

trodden hay, till, her strength failing her, she turned and faced her pursuer.

In his hand she saw the swan-skin cloak. "What have I done?" she cried. "What harm have I ever done to thee, that thou shouldst treat me thus, and keep me bound to earth?"

He gazed upon her tenderly for a while, and a smile lit up now her softened face, for she saw deep love in his eyes.

"Alas! what shall I do?" she said. "I needs must go to that far fairy shore, for in thy land I may not live. Yet, what sayest thou? Art thou content to dwell here in thy land and fare right well, feared, hated maybe, yet through all a conquering man, or, in fairyland, be mine own, live long perchance, yet all unknown? Think of it, then! Be great among the sons of men and forget, or, come with me."

He fell upon his knees and cried, "Ah, wilt thou go? The world is wide and waste, and behold, the world is dead to me. Take me with thee."

Then she set a gold ring with a dark green stone upon his finger, and together they went over the grass till they came to a beech wood where the dry leaves made a carpet underneath their feet.

"Come, then," she said, "give me the swan-skin and lie down on the beech leaves." There she laid a spell upon him. Dimmer grew his sight, till rest, as deep as death, as soft as sleep, crept across his troubled heart. A long time went by before he opened his eyes. Like waking from a dream, too sweet for truth, it seemed. He stood within a marvellous land, fruitful and summer-like and fair. By his side was the fairy maiden. The light wind sported with her hair, crowned with a leaf-like crown of gold. From overhead the sweet blossoms fell softly upon her feet.

"Come," she said, "these are the meadows of my home. Much have I to tell thee, and much to show."

II

For three long years John abode in that marvellous land, till something of a longing came upon him to see his home once more. So it fell that, on a day as he was walking by the fairy maiden's side, she noted his unhappiness.

"What burden on thy soul is laid?" she said. "In thine own land, where a while ago thou dwelt, is it there that thou wouldst go?" With a smile she marked his bright, flushed face. Then she went on: "Thou must go unto thy land and with

patient heart hope and wait, unless by certain sign I call on thee to help me. Each day, at nightfall, thou shalt go unto that place where thou and I first met. There let an hour go by, and if nothing strange happens to thee, then thou shalt know that all is well with me, and keep thou still. Come! time wears." And she led him to the place where first he awoke in fairyland, between a hawthorn and an oak.

"Lie down and dream a dream," she said, "yet hear a word before sleep comes. Thou mayst well be stirred by idle talk to wish for me again. But let no word of such a longing slip past thy lips, for if thou dost, at thy word I needs must come, and ill would that be for us if I were seen."

Then he heard her sing unknown words in a soft, low strain till his senses grew dim, and he passed again into the dreamless land of deep, dark sleep.

When he opened his eyes he stood upon the edge of the beech wood where he had often wandered as a child. Memories of other days came back, and gazing up into a tree, he raised his right arm as if he would climb it. So through the wood and down the hillside he went, and all things seemed familiar to him. Then with anxious face he stood at the porch of his old home, and hearkened to the hum of speech

within. Listening so, he could hear his father's voice, but nothing clearly, and then a pause, and then again the mingled speech of maids and men.

Pulling his hood well over his brow, he pushed open the door. There he stood, gleaming with gold from shoes to head. Every face now turned towards him. From beneath his hood he gazed around ; he saw his father, half risen from the high seat, a silver cup in his brown hand, and by his side sat his mother. For the rest, there were his two brothers and one or two strange faces.

His father rose and cried, " Knight, or fair lord, whosoe'er thou art, if thou mayst share a poor man's feast, sit by me and eat and drink; for my hall is open to peaceful men of all degree."

" Thanks for thy welcome," said John in a feigned voice; " certainly hungry and very weary am I, and glad shall I be of rest."

So by his father's side John ate of that homely cheer. But as he sat the mother's eyes were resting on him. " I ought to know those lips and eyes," she muttered low, but said nothing aloud.

When the meal was over, the host prayed his guest to stay as long as he wished, and he and his two sons went to the fields, leaving John alone with his mother. He sat down on a low stool and began to think dreamily of the days gone by.

Lifting up his eyes, he saw his mother standing near, looking pitifully at him. He rose, threw round her his strong arms, and cried out, "Mother, from thee at least I will never hide. Sit down, and look not strangely at my glory, while I tell my tale."

She smiled amidst her tears, and listened to his story. Then she told him all he wished to hear, and they talked happily together till the men left the fields and came home. With cloak and hood thrown off, John stood and made himself known. Warm welcome did he get from his father and brothers, and the night was passed in mirth and delight.

So day after day went by, till a heavy longing came upon him, and his brooding face would cloud the bliss of many a merry evening. Every day, at set of sun, he went to the meadow as the fairy bade him, and for a long while nothing moved his lips to fatal speech. Then one night, after long hours and days and months of sadness, he called her, "Come!" Then back home he turned.

That night, across the wind there came a sound, as though a horn were wound afar off. The men sat listening till it came again, nearer and sharper now. John grew white, and laid his hand on his beating heart; then once more

loudly rang the horn close by the door, and the men hastily took down their weapons.

They opened wide the door, the wild wind swept through the hall; then all was still. In the midst of them there stood a white-clad maiden, white as snow. "Joy and peace be on this house," she spoke, "and all good things. Come, give me welcome here." Turning to John, she said, "Now rejoice that far away I heard thy voice, and came!"

"Kinsmen," said John, "see her who for my sake has left her mighty state, that she might come and abide with you a little." Then they all cheered as John led her down the hall. She kissed his father and mother and wished them fair and happy life.

But long before the rising of the sun next morn she had crept away. Wearily, with sad, tear-stained, troubled face, she had gazed at John while he slept. "Oh the weary days," she whispered, "that I shall spend in a lonely land! Oh that my words could reach thee in thy sleep, these words that can release me from my wanderings! My feet shall wander soon *East of the Sun, West of the Moon!*"

Softly she stole from the house; the wild west wind blew her hair, and the snow chilled

her feet. On she went into the howling night, till at last her white-clad form seemed one with the snow.

III

When John discovered his loss, he hung his head in bitter grief, for he knew not where in all the world to seek for her. Through the hall he went, and kissed the threshold of the door her well-loved feet had touched, yet saw no signs of departing footsteps upon the snow. Cold blew the wind upon his face as he left behind the home where he was born. Along a well-known, oft-trod road he walked, not knowing why or where. As he wandered on, he saw the wide sea afar off, all black and empty. Over the downs he went, until he came to a harbour-town, where he asked for food and rest.

Long did he stay in the little port waiting for a ship to sail. At last the day came when over the land Spring flamed with love and flowers, and on an eve John's good ship left the harbour. Pale he stood upon the prow, looking with strange longing eyes to the flaming West. All night he lay upon the deck waiting for the dawn. Skyward he looked, and over the mast he saw the moon grow dim, as the great sun

blazed over the green sea. The moon and the sun! He smote his head with sudden light, and words that had seemed half dreamed flashed to his mind, and he cried, "*East of the Sun, West of the Moon!*"

The ship sailed on towards England, and at Dunwich, on the East Coast, John landed, not knowing in the least where he was, but the words "*East of the Sun, West of the Moon*" seemed heaven-sent to him. He journeyed on towards London, feeling most strange among people he had never known.

Hither and thither he went, never complaining, never content, never resting, for many years. He grew old and changed; none knew his face when after vain search he went back again to his father's home. His mother had died, and things seemed changed. For the last time he said farewell, and passed out through the time-worn door.

Through what strange lands he wandered matters not, but at last he sailed through the wild waves of the Indian Sea. One evening, standing by the prow, he seemed more hopeful of success, and at last he could say he was happy. Round about him the sailors stood watching with anxious eyes a long grey bank of clouds away in the East. But John saw it not, his face was

turned towards the West, and the sky there was bright and clear. He raised his eyes just as the sun blazed at its lowest: day was done. He lay down and slept. All at once he woke up, thrown with a mighty force against the mast. With desperate hands he clung to it, while the storm sang its song of death about his ears. Still he held on against the wash of the inrushing sea, for how long the story does not tell; but suddenly, amid the sweetest dream of all, John seemed to fall a long way down, losing all sense of sight and sound. The peace of dull unconsciousness blessed his wild, worn heart.

He woke again upon the shell-strewn sand of a wide bay. It was morning, fresh and fair, with no sign of storm on the sea.

He rose to his feet; the air was sweet around him, the sun was shining, and he looked across the wide ocean, wondering that there was no sign of his lost ship and its company. Then he went closer to the summer sea, and surely now it seemed that he had but dreamed of India, because the sand beneath his feet, washed smooth and flat, showed such shells and creeping things as he knew in the Northland; and round about overhead there flew such sea-fowl as he knew in days of old.

A little while he stood gazing upon that pleasant place, then he passed inland to the hills. The way was fair, yet he saw no house anywhere, no hedge, no garden, no corn, only deer straying. At last he came to where a spreading fruit tree cast delicious shadows. John stayed there and ate of its load of apples, sweet and delicate. Then he smiled and sank down slowly on the grass to rest.

The short night went by in dreams, when once more he awoke with the dawn and climbed the last steep of the hill. Then, gazing down into the vale, he held his breath, as if amazed by all its loveliness. Beneath him was a beautiful valley, and beyond, a deep green wood. By the side of a stream he could see vineyards, slopes of wheat, orchards, and pretty homesteads.

At John's back now the sun shone brightly once more, and once more, with all light gone, above the farther hills hung high the pale thin moon. Then he cried out: "Ah, end the strife, twin lights of God. Surely I shall be lying soon *East of the Sun, West of the Moon!*"

He looked around to find a path to the lower ground. Making his way along the rugged brow of the hill he saw beneath him, half-hid by trees, a marvellous house gleaming in the sun. Down

THE LAND EAST OF THE SUN

"Then she set a gold ring upon his finger." *Page* 53

the hillside he went till he reached it. He turned to the palace door, through which fair-clad people went to and fro. No one spoke to him, no one heeded him; he passed through a fair porch to a pillared court, in which stood groups of maidens and youths with sad, listless eyes. Then he met the armed guard and a long line of serving-men carrying food to the hall. All were silent.

Many a rich cloak brushed past him, many a jewelled sword clinked at the side of knight or lord. At last he passed into the great hall and took his seat with the others, while the servers bore unto the guests rich meats and drink.

Rising before the feast was over, he paced up and down the echoing hall. At last he stopped outside a carved door and laid his hand upon the latch. He opened the door and heard no spoken word, but a rustling of a woman's dress. All around floated a delicate sweet scent. He stepped forth, and with great surprise his weary eyes beheld once more his heart's desire, his life, his love, still on the earth, still there for him.

But with listless head hung low, the fairy-maiden seemed not to see him. She clenched her delicate hands and frowned, and her feet moved uncertainly, while the maidens round her, sitting

at their spindles, spun and spun on. No word could he win from any.

Then a strange thought came to John. He would tell her of his wanderings. "No hope," he said, "at first abode with me. I know not how I lived; the sea, the earth, and sky were a heavy burden to me. Then memory came to me, some image, some remembrance of a word of thine. Didst thou not say this to me that morning when thou partedst from me, 'Ah, couldst thou know, I go too soon, *East of the Sun, West of the Moon*'?"

With a great sigh, as one who throws off a burden, she rose and stood before him, trembling with love and joy. Once more their kind eyes met, and from her lips burst forth a joyful cry. He had spoken the magic words: "*East of the Sun, West of the Moon.*"

The spell that bound them all was broken. His ears now heard her tender speech. She told him of her love and bade all praise him, who for her sake had borne such pain for so many long years. Then no longer silent was the place, new joy lit up every face, and songs were sung in the fair rose-bower, where, crowned with flowers, the lovers stood hand in hand, no more this side of death to part.

II

THE GOLDEN SHOES

I

In days of old there dwelt a Grecian folk between a range of snow-topped mountains and the sea-beat shore, on a plain sheltered from the winter's cold and summer's heat. Their life was easy, spent for the most part in the garden, field, and fold. What things there might be behind the snowy tops of the mountains, but moon and sun, they knew not; nor as yet had any one sunk a shaft in the hillside, or dried the streams to see if beneath the sand gold specks might gleam.

Yet they were rich enough with flocks and herds and leafy vines. Within the homes stood clacking looms, and women twirled the spindles in the winter's gloom, while the men, with deft hands, carved from off the poplar-block.

Sometimes a foreign ship would come and beach in the sandy bay, and then the women-folk from many a home, with heavy laden beasts,

would take their way and spend the day round the black-keeled ship, exchanging their weaving and the carving for gems and jewels and rich garments.

These treasures the peasants would store up in coffers, to be taken out at times, then gold would shine on shoulders smooth and soft, and sparkling gems would glitter from many a hand.

Now in this land where few were poor, though none was passing rich, a certain man abode, who was poorer perhaps than any one who ruled a house. A load of trouble he bore down life's road, for, touching now upon his sixtieth year, his wealth still waned, his house grew poorer.

Why this should be none knew, for he was skilled in all the simple craft of that fair land, with plough and spade, with sickle and with axe. He was wedded, and his grey helpmate, too, ever did her share. Yet did his goods decrease. At the end of the dry season he cut his hay, to lie long in the rain; his wheat was thin and his sheep were slain by wolves; his horses went lame and his kine were useless.

All this befell him and yet he lived on. Not always though had fortune served him thus. In earlier days he had been rich and great; one blessing only he and his wife lacked, they had

no child. Early and late they would pray the gods to take all besides, but give them a child.

For more than twenty years they prayed, then their great desire was granted them. It was March, but the earth had a foretaste of June. The sky was blue, the birds were singing a happy song, the blackthorn was in full blossom, the south wind was breathing gently. That afternoon, within his well-hung hall, the goodman lay thinking until a gentle sleep fell on him and he began to dream. In his dream he stood in the midst of his garden, hand in hand with his wife, and both their eyes were lovingly bent upon a little blossom at their feet. As they bent over it, the day seemed changed to cloudiness and rain, and the sweet flower was grown to a young sapling. As they looked, a bright flame blazed round it, hiding it for a time, then a weariness came over them, and on the earth they lay down side by side as if they had died. Yet they knew that over them hung the tree, grown mighty now and thick-leaved. On each bough hung a crown, a sword, or ship, or a fair temple ; and armour rang amid that leafy world, and now and then strange songs were sung in tongues of foreign men.

Amid these sounds the goodman heard at last

a song in his own tongue, and he sat upright and blinked at the broad bright sun that cast its beams through the window, till his gathering sight showed him outside two damsels, pail on head, who went by, singing, to the milking-shed. Meeting them, with jingling bit and trace, came the grey team from the field.

Then rose the happy goodman, for his dream seemed in no ways ill, and wandered forth into the March sun. From barn to well-stocked field he went that eve, smiling on all. The soft south wind, the flowers amid the grass, the fragrant earth, the sweet sounds everywhere seemed gifts too great almost for man to bear.

Long he wandered, the happiest of men, till day was gone, and the white high moon cast a long shadow on the stones, when he came once more to his homestead door, and there a girl stood watching, and a cry burst from her lips when she saw him come.

"O welcome to thy twice-blessed home!" she said; "give thanks unto the gods who thus have heard thy prayer." And the goodman went in and looked for the first time on a fair little maiden, his infant daughter.

On the morrow he held a high feast and loaded all his guests with handsome gifts. By

the next year the child had grown and thriven, and again, in his hall, high feast was held and good gifts given to the departing guests, though his goods had grown less and there was less to offer.

As the time passed, with the child's growth, ill-luck grew too, and field by field his lands fell from him. So things went on till the June of the maid's nineteenth year. She had grown so fair and beautiful that the like of her had never been seen within that land. But poverty and sorrow had crushed all joy from the house. With grave set face the maiden laboured, nor heeded what thing she did; no words escaped her, yet her father, who loved her, saw she was wearied of the life she was leading, and wondered much what thoughts were hidden within her heart.

One evening in June, the three sat resting in the bare great hall, while the goodman told of an adventure he had had :—

". . . Well, in the end we took in tow their tall ship and beached her in the bay. Then we fell to ransacking her hold, and took away armour, fair cloths, and silver things and gold, rich raiment, wine and honey. We shared the spoil. Good things I had,—two casks of wine,

a jar of honey, and ah! my heart doth ache, Rhodope, my daughter, when I tell thee of the gold-sewn purple robe I had, that now would match thy beauty well.

"What else? A crested helm all wrought in gold, a bow and sheaf of arrows,—there they hang, take down the bow, goodwife, it's a thing of price, though unadorned. Now light the taper for a little while to see a marvel."

Then speedily the goodwife turned with the candle, and to the great chest the goodman went. Turning over the coarser household stuff, which he threw aside, from the lowest depths his hand brought out a red silken cloth richly embroidered, wrapped about something.

With languid eyes that hoped for little joy Rhodope turned and gazed, waiting to see the fair toy. But a strange light shone in her bright eyes when the goodman now unfolded the cloth and showed the gleam of precious gems and gold.

There, upon the silken cloth lay twin shoes, first made for some fair woman's feet. They were wrought like the meadows of an April day, with gems amidst a sun of gold.

Rhodope stood by these fair things, blushing faintly. She touched the latchets and daintily

drew her hand across them, then let it fall again. She then turned away to such rough work as the season asked of her, with face firm set to bear that weary life.

Then said the goodman with a sad smile, turning to Rhodope, "No child had I then, only riches; long have I kept these treasures, firstly because few men of our land could pay me well for them, and partly because once a man, well skilled in learning, said that they would bring me better fortune.

"But we must have bread, and Jove's high-priest has ever prayed to get these fair things, so, daughter, I give thee this charge. Take these to-morrow morn unto Jove's priest and say we needs must live, and therefore do I send him these fair shoes that he may say what he will give to me that they may shine upon his daughter's feet when she stands before the altar. Perchance I may gain a yoke of oxen to turn the home-field deeper; the meal, too, is growing less, and thou, my daughter, art not clad to meet November winds, and casks must be had for the wine."

As he spake a light flush came into Rhodope's cheek. Then cried the goodwife, "Ah, thou art ashamed that we are so fallen!"

Rhodope sat still, her face set like stone, and

the goodman spake, "Nay, mother, nay; be patient," and kindly he smiled at the maiden, who cast on him one quick glance and then bent over her work. With a half-choked sigh the goodman rose, and from a corner took up some willow-withes and began to shape the handle of a winnowing fan.

II

With the new day's sun the maiden started on the way which led to the vale where the priest worked. Her path lay between sunny meadows and green vineyards, now merry with the voices of maidens and men. They shouted greetings to her, and she answered softly as a queen. The dark-eyed shepherd slowly passed her by with eyes cast down, so unfit he seemed to look at her smileless face, over which there shone a glory as of a bright secret sun.

Her mother stood within her door and watched her. "Ah," she muttered, "if thou wert set high up as thou art low, on many a neck those feet of thine would go!"

Heeding nothing of those she passed, Rhodope went upon her way, and walking fast soon left behind the tilled fields and the cottages. She turned south, and began at last to mount up

heathery slopes, dotted over with red-trunked pines and mossy rocks.

She still walked fast, though the sun was high, for her heart was set on strange wild thoughts as she clenched her hands harder over the things that lay hidden in her gown. Aloud she cried: "Here amid these fields and grey mountains do I live, day after day, nothing new, face like to face; no one comes near to give us some bright dream before we die. Would that I were gone and lived again another life."

Panting, she turned and stood high up the hillside; a light wind sang fitfully through the pine-tree wood. Below, cattle were grazing on the green hill-slopes, beyond were the changing cornfields and fair homesteads, with the white road winding on, bearing specks as of men and horses, then the grey sea meeting the horizon.

A little while she gazed, then, with a sigh, she turned again and went on toward the pass, but slowly now, and wearily, taking no heed of what she passed. At last she came to the temple-vale, and there she stopped and started, for she heard her name called. From the hillside came a hound that fawned upon her, and when she raised her eyes she saw the man to whom it belonged

—a huntsman clad in gown of blue. She smiled, for it was the high-priest's son.

"Rhodope! thou goest afoot this merry morn," he said. "Hast thou some errand with my father or me?" And he stretched out his hand to her, but she stood motionless as an image. Then she spoke—

"I thought to find thy father and to give to him alone a message from my father. Is he gone?"

"These two nights, maiden, hath he been at sea; if thou turnest again, thou mayst meet him coming home."

"Nay," said she; "I will go on to the temple. I have poor offerings that my mother bade me bear."

"I will go with thee," he said, "and till the sun is getting low thou shalt dwell in our house, and in the evening, if it please thee, I will go with thee to thine own home."

Nought she spoke for a while, and his heart beat quicker with hope of happiness, but at last her eyes met his and she said, "What wouldst thou? To my heart this folk and clime are wearisome, so get thee gone upon thy way; to thee this world is wide enough, full of warm hearts. Mine is cold. Farewell."

He gazed at her as one who did not hear, then clutching tight his short sword's sheath, passed slowly along the seaward way.

She stayed now, gazing downwards. At her feet lay a dark wood nestling in the hollow of the hill, and in its shade was a little lake into whose waters flowed a babbling stream. She went once more upon her way ; the shadows fell short now, for it was the hottest part of the day, and round the mountain-tops the sky looked grey with heat.

At last she set her feet upon the bridge that crossed the stream and walked on swiftly till her skirt was caught by a bough of brier-rose, whose sweet blossoms were draggled in the dust. She stooped and drew from her hem the hooked green thorns, then with a sigh she cast aside the broken bough. From the dusty road she turned and looked over the broad blue lake sheltered in the dark oak wood.

She felt drowsy and weary as she retraced her steps over the bridge and walked along by the stream. She watched it widen out into the lake, then she lay down within the shade on last year's brown oak leaves.

As she lay, her fingers stole to the things that were hidden in her gown. She drew them forth and slowly began to unroll the silken cloth,

letting the sun's rays shine on the gemmed shoes, the while she weaved stories round them.

Long she lay there, gazing at the sky between the thick leaves, growing drowsier. The grey rabbit slowly hobbled by, the slim squirrel twisted over her, and, as if no one were near, the woodpecker slipped up the smooth-barked tree, and the water-hen clucked fearlessly near her.

In a little while she woke and still felt as if dreaming. The sun was past the middle of the day, and all was quiet but for faint sounds made by the wild-wood creatures.

From her wallet she drew out the coarse food she had brought and ate it daintily, then, kneeling down over the babbling streamlet, she dipped her hollow hand into the grey water and drank.

Beneath the tree lay the glittering shoes. She stood a while and gazed at them, then stooped down and from the grass raised one by the latchet. Slowly she took off her own, and one by one set the bright things upon her shapely feet.

Then she turned again to the thick wood, and wandered through its cool shade till she came to a bay with sandy shore—a treeless, sunlit, grassy space. How friendly the sun, the bright flowers, and the grass seemed after the dark wood ! With her gown daintily lifted, she passed slowly to the

water's edge and sat down on the grassy shore. There she stayed, watching a little breeze sweep up the bay. The water was shallow, and a shore of hard white sand met the green grass, and as clear as glass the water ran in ripples over the strand, until it nearly touched the flowery grass. It was a dainty bath for weary limbs, and so the maiden thought, for she began to put aside her raiment. How her golden hair shone in the sun, as she stooped and raised the glittering shoes and cast them aside.

She stood to watch the little waves ripple round her feet, then slowly she wandered on till she was many feet from the shore.

As she played, she heard a bird's harsh cry, and looking up the steep hillside she saw a broad-winged eagle hovering near.

She stood to watch its sweeping flight as once more above her golden head rang out that shrill note. Again that cry! and then a flapping of wings quite close at hand. A great mass suddenly falls! then rises again! Before Rhodope could raise her voice, she beheld within the eagle's claws the gleam of gems and gold.

She gazed at him as, circling wide, he soared aloft. For a time she could see the gold shoe glitter, then the great mountain hid him from view.

She laughed that such a thing should happen, for she feared not their lack of wealth. When she was again clad, she turned back through the wood, weaving stories that perhaps this strange adventure would bring her joy and happiness.

But her pleasant dreams were soon dispelled when, within the dimly lighted hall of her home, her mother's anger broke out. All life seemed drear and loveless. With cold eyes, but a smile on her red lips, she watched them—her mother crying and scolding, her father bending over a half-finished bowl he was carving.

Sobs at last choked the mother's angry words; then the goodman rose and took Rhodope's hand in his, and with love in his eyes tried hard to comfort her. "Some bliss, my child," he said, "awaits thee yet." Then down he sat, and began to talk cheerfully of their life and their needs, till a smile lit up once more the goodwife's tearful face.

From the one shoe that was left the mother wanted to tear the gems away and burn the silk, to make an end of Rhodope's pride, she said, which was growing worse and worse. The goodman stood a while and gazed at Rhodope as she sat quietly with her spinning wheel, then he spoke: "Never was I praised for much wisdom, and can I now be certain what to do? True it is that our

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"There, gleaming in the sunlight, was her lost shoe." *Page* 51.

needs are many and that those gems would help us much. Yet do I grudge them. What sayest thou, daughter? didst thou ever hear of the strange dream I had at thy birth?"

The girl's face grew red as she stopped her spinning to listen. "Yea," said she, "I have heard something of it, but my memory is dim."

"Nay, child," said the goodman, smiling, "I see thou knowest it, there is no need to tell it thee again. Daughter, keep the shoe, and we will hope it may bring thee happier days."

While he was speaking Rhodope rose and threw her fair arms round the old man's neck, whispering softly, "I know thy need; hard is the world; if we could but live another life!" A little time she hung about him, then she unwound her arms and went her way.

III

So the year passed with little brighter hopes; the pinching winter-tide went by, and spring gave way to burning summer. A year to the day had passed since Rhodope made her vain journey to the temple valley. Now she stood before the homestead door again, for she had to go to the town to buy some household thing.

With slow feet and knitted brow, she crossed

the threshold, and went on toward the sea, where lay the simple market-town. A mile of lonely road led to the first house of the street, so on she went, till half-way down the road she stopped. There by the wayside, on a patch of grass, lay a grey old hound, and against an elm tree leaned his master, an old shepherd. She stood thinking, then turned and at a slow speed went back to her home, just as the old man moved to speak to her.

Quickly she went to her sleeping-room, and kneeling beside a chest she raised the lid and drew out the precious shoe which for a year had been hidden there. Placing it in her gown, she went forth on her journey again. Village-folk thronged the highway, and as she passed she caught fragments of their talk. They spoke of foreign men who had come to the bay last evening in a strange black-hulled ship.

Their talk raised new wild hopes in her, but still she hurried on to the town to do her work, wondering as she passed through the market-place why the people were crowding round what seemed a glitter of steel and gold.

When her work was done, she went back to the market-place and drew near the crowd, the wondering folk drawing on one side to let the beautiful maiden pass. When she came near

enough, she saw a goodly company of strange men, young and old, in glittering attire, and with them the chief priest ready to offer sacrifice on the altar which stood in the centre of the market-place.

Rhodope stood forth alone on the steps of the altar, a beautiful maiden, with eyes gazing intently on the tripod which stood by the side. For there, gleaming in the sunlight, was her lost shoe! Her eager eyes beamed with such glory that all the folk stared in astonishment, and all waited for her to speak. There she stood, clad in a gown of dark grey woollen stuff, yet she looked a goddess wandering on the earth.

Gently, with no flush on her smooth cheek, she mounted the steps and spoke out clearly: "Perchance ye seek a match for that fair thing ye seem to prize so much. I have it here, and both of them, on this day a year ago, were on my feet. My father will be glad that it is found."

A great shout went up, as quietly from her gown she drew the shoe and laid it by its fellow.

Then a grey-bearded man, clad in gems and gold, cried, "Praise to the gods who do all things aright! Happy am I to have seen so fair a mate for our great King!"

Rhodope was pale now, though she spoke no word, but held her head high as though it wore a crown. Calmly her deep eyes passed over the crowd, till the old man said—

"O glorious maiden, hearken! A year ago, our great King made solemn sacrifice unto the gods. The altar shone in the bright sun, when suddenly there came a cry from out the blue sky and a golden flame shot down. There were some who said they could see an eagle, like a faint speck, far above the altar whereon lay this gift of love. How that may be I know not, but the King stretched out his hand and drew to him the strange-sent gift. For many days he thought of nothing but the fair jewelled thing, until at last he bade us take this shoe and search diligently in every place we came to, till we saw the face of her whose foot had touched it. 'For,' he said, 'whoever she is, she is meant for me.'

"We wondered at his bidding, but constantly have we gone over the wide world and trod many rough ways, have been tossed on many a sea, until the gods brought us to thee."

"Ah," said the maiden, "what is it ye want of me? Is it a little thing that I should go, leaving my people and my father's land, to wed some proud great man I do not know? Yet, fear

not! for surely I shall go where the gods have sent me, so it shall be even as ye will."

Bowing before the rough-clad maid, the old man led her to an empty ivory chair, and each man paid her homage. When all this at last was done, they prayed her give command when they should sail. She raised her face, now pale and quiet, and said in a low voice, "To-day were best, for here I cannot rest. The old is gone, the new is not yet come, and nowhere yet I seem to have a home. But when I go from homespun unto gold, my father and mother, poor folk, bent, old, beaten by fortune, must go with me and share my proud new life beyond the sea. And since the old man loveth me so well, my lips alone must tell him how all is changed."

So she arose and hastened homewards. The old man was tending the kine as she cried aloud: "O father, turn and gaze on Fortune's friend, the Queen of glorious days! Great days have the gods given to thee and me, and soon thou shalt wonder that thou ever didst keep these kine!" Then she told him the whole tale, eagerly at first, but faltered when she saw him tremble in every limb.

He tried to speak, and the words came at last: "If thou art glad, then surely I am glad; and yet

the days have not been so wholly bad, and I had dreamt of quiet, happy years to come. But shame on me that I should spoil thy joy! Daughter, I will surely do thy bidding and go with thee. But think well if it be not but a fleeting fancy to take us with thee. Child, I pray thee never forget this face of mine, this heart that loves thee well."

She cried, "Ah, wilt thou make me lonelier than the gods have made me? Thou must be near me to stay my mazed steps and cheer me on life's hard way. I will not take my bidding back, go thou and get thee ready to be gone. The sails are flapping in the haven now, and we depart before the day is done."

He said no more, but with a loving smile upon his worn old face he turned towards the house with one great sigh, and Rhodope was left alone with her thoughts.

In a little while her father and mother came out from the house, and the three passed on to the market-place. The goodman had put on an old scarlet suit now worn threadbare, and as the three stood together, the simple country-folk broke out into shouts of joy. The mother flushed, but the old man turned pale and looked helplessly around. Rhodope grew softer-eyed

and spake royally: "My lords, I wish that we depart at once." Then said they, "All is ready, the ship is turned towards the sea, sacrifice has been done, goodly gifts have been found for the people of this land; but wilt not thou be crowned and clad in fair array of gold?"

"Nay," said she, "let the King behold me in this lowly guise. Make no more delay."

So seaward all the people moved, rejoicing, and Rhodope felt herself beloved at last. She took her father's hand in her slim one, her red lips trembled, and her eyes were wet with tears. They came soon to the gangway which ran from the ship to the pier. She stepped in front, and passed on to the ship, with one hand held back as if to take her father's hand. On she walked towards the prow, and watched the billows break, not noting when men threw back the ropes and the ship moved.

At last she turned and gazed down the decks in the twilight, feeling very lonely, in spite of all the folk who stood around ready to do her lightest service. A terror seized her, she passed down the deck, her hair loosed by the driving wind, till at the mast she stopped and muttered, "Ah, he is not here; and I, where am I? The dream seemed so fair when it began, but now

I am alone, waiting I know not what, till life be done."

Then with steady feet she went again towards the prow, scanning eagerly the faces as she passed. At last she spoke to the grey-haired man: "Where is my father?"

"O Queen," he said, "the old man wished still to dwell among his own folk. He said thou knewest he did not like strange eyes watching him. What can I say more? Surely thou knowest he never left the shore? Command us, if thou wilt, to put back."

Rhodope trembled, her lips moved to bid the thing be done, yet no words came. She stood upright and said, "I strive not with Fate; sail on!" and swiftly the great ship went upon her way.

III

THE MAN BORN TO BE KING

I

In days of old there was a King who ruled over wide lands and was held in much honour, for his kingdom was peaceable and his people were happy. His city was the home of men of learning and ability; not one who seemed well skilled in anything was driven from his door.

It chanced one day that this King, clad in his glittering gold array, held a royal festival. At the feast in the glorious hall sat the sages in honoured places, men whom the King knew well. But among the faces he saw a little wizened man with lined face grown grey with age; he was beardless and bald, but his two deep-set eyes gleamed with a knowledge of mysteries none knew but he. He spoke few words, and those he did utter received but scant attention. But the young King failed not to notice a flickering smile upon his face as now and then he turned away

from the learned men and looked towards the throne.

When the feast was over, the King, wishing to know what new thing he might have to show, bade his servants bring the stranger to him. When the old man stood before the throne the King spoke: "We welcome thee to the feast! What is thine art? Canst thou in rhyme tell stories of the olden time, or dost thou sing of wars? Knowest thou how to read the stars, or dost thou bring healing to the sick? What gift dost thou bring me here, where no one but a man of learning is held dear?"

"O King," said he, "I know but few things well, though I have toiled for many a day along the hard way of learning. Yet have I come unto thy town to tell thee something that I learned from gazing on the stars, something I saw written down of thee and who shall have thy kingdom when thou art gone."

"Speak quickly," said the King, "and tell me of this thing."

"Sire," said the Sage, "thou holdest thine ancient line as a thing divine, so long it hath ruled undisturbed; but now there shall be an end to this, for surely in my glittering page I read that he who shall sit next on this thine ancient throne shall be no better born than I."

"Yea," said the King, "this may be; yet, O Sage, before I believe thee, thou must show me some token, or tell me something in my past life that is only known to me, then surely I will give thee great gifts and make thee head of all those who watch the planets rise and fall."

"Bid these stand backward from thy throne," the Sage said, "then to thee alone will I tell of long-hidden matters, and after, if thou believest, well—if thou dost not, well also; I ask no gift of thee, only leave to go."

"Let this thing be," answered the King; "and ye, my councillors, stand back, for I have more need of air, and wish to walk in my bower to hearken to this grave elder's talk and gain new wisdom."

With this, he rose and led the way into a grove of olive trees, and when they were in the midst of them he turned and said, "Speak, friend, and make an end of this folly, and take this golden chain for thy reward."

"Hearken!" said the Sage, "a year has well-nigh passed since Antony thy trusted friend stood beneath this tree and took a jewelled cup from thee and drank swift death in the guise of wine. And why? Because he of all men knew how thou hadst caused the death of thy Earl

Marshal by leading him on to ride into an ambush of his foes."

"Thou knowest that by me he died!" cried the King; "how if now I cried 'Help! the magician slayeth me!'? Swiftly twenty sword-blades would be clashing in thy ribs."

"Not thus, O King, I fear to die," said the Sage; "death shall pass me by many a year yet. But hearken to this most certain thing, and fear not because this tale I know, for I go back to my grey tower high above the hills, where no man knoweth me." So saying, back he turned unto the feast, and went down the hall, heeding no one, then left the palace and the town. Back to the hall too the King went, with eyes bent in anxious thought, and for many days took no delight in his riches or his kingly lot.

But time passed, and midst this and that he quite forgot the wise man's message. He married a noble lady, a princess rich and fair, and together they led a happy life.

It happened one day at the end of summer that the King was hunting with his friends in the woods. They had had right good sport, and now when the noon was long past and the thick woods grew overcast, they roused the mightiest deer of all. The King bade his huntsmen not to leave

the mighty beast till they had won him, no matter what the time. His horn he blew and galloped on, taking no thought of anything, till dark night forced him to stay his swift course. His steed had outrun all the others, and the King found himself alone.

Glancing at the stars here and there between the thick branches, he turned back and peered into the darkness, but saw and heard nothing of his companions. Groping about from tree to tree to find a leafy spot where he might pass the night, he chanced to see between the dark trunks of the trees a faint glimmering light. Thither he turned, hoping it might be some peasant's hut where he could find rough food or shelter at the least.

Leading on his wearied horse, he crept blindly from tree to tree till he came to a cleared space in the wood, and there he found a hut from whose half-opened door there streamed the light that he had seen glimmering from afar. Just as he was come to the open space, a shadow flitted over the grass, and on the threshold of the wretched hut stood a big man with a bar of wood in his right hand, who seemed as though he was getting ready for a blow.

"Friend," cried the King, "may God reward thee, if thou wilt give me rest and food this night!"

"Nay," said the man, "my wife is dying, thou canst not enter here; but near by is my asses' stall, it is empty now, so thou mayst lie there and sleep till dawn of day, and I will bring thee what I can of food and drink."

"I thank thee," said the King, "and will reward thee for this good deed."

"Nay," answered the man, "before the morn I shall be too weary and forlorn to think of gold"; and with these words he turned and from the hut brought out a lantern, some rye-bread and wine, and led his unknown visitor to the shed and left him there.

When the King had eaten the bread and had quenched his thirst with the green wine, he tied his horse to a post, lay down on some dried bushes, and was soon fast asleep.

But in an hour he awoke, shaking with fear, for words were ringing in his ear like an echo of a shrill voice, crying, "*Take! take!*" but he could remember nothing of the dream he had had. Then he arose, trembling in every limb, and with sword drawn passed out into the forest and crept about cautiously. He could hear nothing, so, wrapping himself round in his huntsman's cloak, he lay down and slept again. Once more he awoke with shrill words echoing

in his ear—"*Give up! give up!*" He sat upright, bewildered, gazing through the night until his weary eyes grew dim and he sank again into slumber. This time he dreamed that beside his leafy bed stood the old Sage, who, bending down his head to him, said with a mocking smile, "Take or give up, what matters it? This new-born child shall surely sit upon thy seat when thou art gone."

When he awoke the sun shone through the forest trees, and shivering in the morning breeze he rose and went to the woodman's hut.

He found the poor man in deep grief; his wife had died in the night, and he was left with a little infant boy. The King stood in the doorway, looking with scornful, troubled eyes at that home of poverty, with its earthen floor and three stumps of trees that did for stool and chairs. Ah! how well he remembered that wretched home in days to come! But as he gazed he heard a great horn sound through the woods, and knew it for his own hunting-call. Soon was heard the shout of his people as they came nearer. Lifting up his horn, he blew a long shrill blast, and through the close-set thicket to the cleared space came his friends, rejoiced that he was found at last.

The poor woodman turned with doleful face to look at the gaily dressed, glittering throng, and gazed stupidly as he heard the name of "King." He said not a word, but his guest spoke: "Sirs, this luckless woodman, whom ye see, gave me good shelter through the night with food and drink; therefore shall he have more than gold for his reward. His wife is dead and he has an infant son, him I will take and rear. He shall grow to be a brave soldier to fight for some king or lord. How sayest thou, goodman?"

"Sire," he said, weeping, "since my wife is dead, it shall be even as thou willest, though I had hoped to have a son to help me get through my day's work, but he must go if he is to grow to manhood; and I must wander forth,—east, west, south, north are all alike to me. Forgive me if I offer little thanks."

The King took but small notice of what the woodman said, so impatient was he to have the body of his enemy. To an old squire he said, "Bring to me the babe and give the goodman this," and he offered a piece of gold.

The woodman picked up a rough square box made of old wood and lined with hay, in which lay the infant boy, and gave it to the squire.

Then all mounted their horses, and soon were far away from the hut.

Through the wood rode the King and his company, the King moody and in deep thought, till when they were near the open country and could see the road run on to the wooden bridge that crossed a stream, he turned and said to his lords, "Ride on, sirs, the way is clear. I have nothing to fear from my own people, and my foes are few. I wish to ride slowly homewards through the fields. The squire who bears the child will keep me company, and doubtless by the stream there is some house where we can find a nurse for the infant till he grow old enough to learn how to earn gold and glory, and perchance grow to be a lord."

The men galloped speedily on, while the King stood with drawn rein watching their green coats disappear from view. Then he turned to the squire who held the child, noting again the box in which it lay. On one side of it he could see a lion hastily painted in red upon a ground of white; inside lay the baby boy. Then said the King, "My ancient line thou and thy sires have served through good and ill, and unto thee my will is law. Ride near me and hearken what I say."

He shook his rein, and side by side down through the meadows they rode. Then the King told his old servant everything, both of the Sage and of his dream. Drawing near the stream, he went on: "Yet this shall never be, for surely, as thou lovest me, adown this water he shall float with this rough box as his boat; then if he must take my throne let God save him if He will, I shall not have shed his blood."

"Yea," said the squire, "thy words are good, for the whole sin will lie on me who would do even greater things for thee if there were need. Yet note, I pray, it may be he will be saved; what wouldst thou do, then, if thou shouldst meet him another day amongst men? I counsel thee to let him go, since thy will cannot alter Fate."

"Yea, yea," answered the King impatiently, "that may be, still let me but once see this box whirl in the swift eddies or get entangled in the drift of weeds and wrong side up"; and with that he swiftly rode on across the bridge. Near the end of it he stopped and turned to watch the old squire lean over the bridge-rail and drop the luckless babe. He heard a muttered word and a splash and a cry from the wakened child, then saw the cradle hurry by, whirled round and

round and sinking, but as yet safely holding its frail burden.

With a frown on his brow, the King rode on to his home, wondering if he had rid himself of his feeble foe. He bade the squire ride nearer and talk to him of everyday affairs.

When he reached the palace gates good news was brought to him : an infant had been born, a princess, strong and fair of face. So glad was the King that he nearly forgot his troubled dream and the ride by the river-side.

II

Years passed in hopes and fears and deeds on many a battlefield, till fourteen had gone by since the King lay on the forest leaves and dreamed that dream, remembered now but once and again when the minutes of some sleepless night crawled toward the dawn of a new day.

One autumn morn the King and his courtiers rode toward that same stream ; they had been flying their falcons, and now tired of the sport they halted at a mill upon the river-side to rest. It was a pleasant resting-place, with its orchard full of rosy apples, and the doves crooning on the roof of the old mill, keeping time with the

great wheel's measured clack. There the King stayed, and since the autumn noon was hot, he thought it would be good to dine that day in such a restful spot. He told the miller his wish, who was joyful at such honour, and held the King's stirrup while he dismounted, then led him over the stream to the orchard, where the King sat at ease under an apple tree and ate and drank right merrily.

The miller brought him such as he could of country fare,—ripe yellow plums, wasp-bitten pears, the first to fall, junket and cream and fresh honey.

Smilingly the King looked at the old man; he was short and round, red-faced, with long thin flaxen hair, but with him was a boy, very fair, grey-eyed, with golden hair. When he saw him the King thought he could scarcely be the miller's son, and laughingly asked who the mother was of such a fine youth.

"Sire," said the miller, "the boy is not ours, but we found him fourteen years ago to-day."

Then the King remembered a long-forgotten day, and his face grew troubled; but while he thought, the man turned and went away, leaving the lad alone with him, and as their eyes met a great horror rose in his heart, and he shrank

back shuddering. Just then the miller returned, followed timidly by his wife, old and worn, who was carrying in her hand some box. "Dame," said her husband, "tell the King how this befell; speak out, and fear not to be bold."

"My tale," she said, "is short enough. This day fourteen years ago I rode along this river-side on my way home from market, and as I went wearily along I heard a feeble cry come from out the stream. Getting off my mule, I saw a naked new-born infant laid in a rough box that had been caught by a thick tangled bed of weeds. I waded for him waist deep; the box then could scarcely keep afloat, and the child was at the point of death with hunger and cold. I bore him to the mill and cherished him, bringing him up as my own, since no one came to claim him. Often have I rejoiced to sit by the fire and watch him play, and now behold him! But some day I look to lose him, for indeed I think he is of royal birth, unfit to be with us. Now, my lord, thou hast heard every word about my son—this boy—whose name is Michael, since he came to us at Michaelmas. See, sire, the box wherein he was, which I have kept."

She drew a cloth away, but the King knew long before she moved it what he should see.

Carelessly, it seemed, he glanced at it, but he saw the well-remembered painted lion, and he thought, "Who of all these were then with me amongst the trees and saw this box?" Presently it came to his mind that none but old Samuel his squire could have noticed it, since Samuel had thrown his cloak over it as he rode through the forest with his burden, and it was not till all were well away that the cloak had been drawn off.

Changed and downcast, the King with his lords rode away, still haunted by the new-found face of his foe. He reached his ancient castle, and forced himself to be merry lest any should notice his mood.

The morrow came, and the King sat alone with Samuel and talked with him. In a short time the old squire came out, muttering, "They are lucky men indeed who serve no kings; and will not he outlive this day whom the deep water could not slay?" With that, he mounted a strong horse and rode speedily off to the mill.

There he found Michael sitting by the stream deep in thought. The boy had heard every word of the old dame's story, and noted how the thin, dark face of the King gazed at him with seeming love and awe, as if it were wondrous strange to find him there; so in his heart he thought to

play some royal part and do great deeds. As he was thinking there came in sight the old squire, he who years ago had carried him from the woodman's hut.

He was dressed like a King's man in cloth of gold, wearing a plumed hat, and by his side a sword, while round his neck he bore a knife whose hilt was figured over with green leaves on a golden ground. The stems of the leaves enwound a silver scroll on which was written in black letters : "*Strike ! for no dead man cometh back !*"

The boy gazed at him earnestly with beating heart as he came nearer and at last drew rein beside him. In an undertone Samuel said, "Surely thou shalt fulfil thy destiny, and in spite of all thou wilt not die till thou hast won the crown." But aloud he said, "Lad, tell me where I may see the good miller, for I have a message for him from the King concerning thee, for surely thou art his lad."

At once Michael jumped up and led the squire to the house, where they found the miller, who bowed to the ground on seeing the knight. Then from his cloak Samuel drew a scroll and said, "Good friend, read here, and do my bidding without fear."

"Sir," said the man, "but little skill in letters

have I; let my dame come, for she can read them well."

"Nay, friend," answered the squire. "Let it be enough for thee to see this seal at the scroll's end that it is my lord the King's, and hear my word that I come hither from my lord to take away thy foundling lad to serve the King from this day forth."

The miller looked downcast at the message, and stood twisting his dusty hat. "Well, my lord, so must it be; he is no kin of mine, though I would have left him when I came to die all the things I have, with this mill, and surely he might have lived here a life of plenty and happiness; and near there is a fair maid who would have been a good wife to him."

Samuel laughed scornfully at the miller's answer. "O good soul, thou thinkest, then, that this is a life for men well born, as our King deems this young boy is. Tell me, good lad," turning to the boy, "where lies thy happiness?"

Michael, who had meanwhile stood pensively by, his head full of thoughts of a noble life and great deeds, turned shamefaced and red. "Fair sir," he said, "my life is sweet and good, and our ranger says that I draw so good a bow that in a few months I may join those who try to win the

bag of new florins that folk shoot for in the market town; and, sir, please you to look up and down the stream and watch the fish; truly it is a fair place all the year."

"Thou showest country breeding," answered Samuel, "in spite of thy fair face. Take heart, for thou goest to a better place now. Miller, farewell, thou needest not tell the neighbours of the lad's good fortune. Take this bag of gold, and grind no corn for many a day, for it would buy thy mill and thee."

He moved to go, but Michael stood a while lost in thought, with the kind miller's rough farewell ringing in his ears. Tears were gathering in his eyes as Samuel plucked him by the sleeve, and he turned and left his old home with saddened face.

But even as he did so the simple dame came from out the house and cast rough arms about the lad, saying, "Fair son, mayst thou live in bliss and die in peace, remembering this, when thou art come to high estate, that in our house thou hadst the best of all we had."

"Good dame, enough," said Samuel; "the day grows late, and the King is waiting to see this new-found lord." He strode away as he said this, half ashamed, and shyly the lad went after him.

They crossed the stream, and there both mounted the great grey war-horse and rode away without another word.

Riding silently along, they reached at last the dusty road that led to the King's palace, but Samuel turned and led his horse over the bridge and on toward the heathy woods. Michael wondered at this, and said aloud, "Dwells then the King, fair sir, within the wood?"

"Young lad, the King may dwell wherever it seems good to him, and now it pleaseth him to live with the black monks across the wood," said old Samuel. So saying, he spurred his horse to mount the hill, and then on into the thick pine wood. To Michael the place was strange; he had never left the green meadows for these dark places, and now his eyes gazed round for fairies and giant woodcutters, and other strange things the old wives' stories tell.

As they rode along Michael grew drowsy, and noted not how the time went by till they reached a clearing on the top of a rough gravelly hill, at the bottom of which flowed a dirty brook half choked with grass and tall rushes. There the squire drew rein and bade Michael get down, saying his horse could not carry them both, so slowly down the valley-side they went, Michael

walking by the side of the rider and singing snatches of songs he knew.

Samuel clutched at the knife that hung about his neck, and turning said in a hoarse voice, "My girths are loosening, come and take the straps and draw them tighter, lad."

Then Michael stopped his song and without a word put out his hand to the straps; but as he stood with bent head straining to tighten what was already tight, the steel flashed bright in Samuel's hand and fell deep in the boy's side. He staggered and fell, with wide eyes fixed on Samuel, who had jumped from his horse and now knelt beside him to make sure the lad was dead. His heart still beat. Samuel's hand fell upon the knife, but ere his fingers clutched it, far off he seemed to hear a bell. He listened, once again clearly came the tinkling sound, and thinking the boy's guardian angel was drawing nigh to slay the slayer, he leapt on his horse and like a madman spurred him on to gallop, nor stopped till at the bridge the horse fell dead, and Samuel wandered on foot throughout the night, and came at dawn to the palace gate.

There he went at once to the King and told him how he had fared. But the King was not pleased. "I thought I had sent a man of war

to do my will, not one who would fly at the tinkling of a bell before he was sure his work was done."

But Samuel said, " The lad is dead; so ends, O King, the prophecy."

The King gave Samuel gold and many other rewards, but they failed to save his life, for he died before the winter came.

III

The days and years went by, and still the King lived in great happiness, wanting only this, a son to share his bliss and reign when he was gone.

His daughter, the Princess Cecily, was the fairest of all fair maids and in her eighteenth year. It was then her mother died, and in a short time the King was wedded again.

The Princess now left her home to live for a month at the King's quiet country-palace, and at the end of that time she was to wed a neighbouring prince. But scarcely had she left when news was brought to the King that Peter the old Abbot from across the forest had come to visit him, bringing with him five other monks and a body of ten serving-men, stout and tall and well armed.

The King heard what the Abbot had to say, and graciously prayed him and his men to stay and eat. "Thou hast some tall men with thee, my lord Abbot," said the King, "would that I had such every day with me!" But as he spoke his loud voice sank to a whisper, nor heard he anything of what the Abbot was answering, for under a steel helmet he beheld those eyes again that once beneath locks of gold he saw under the apple trees. He grew pale to the lips, till, gathering courage, he forced a smile and turned facing Michael. "Raise up the steel cap from thine head," he said; "methinks I know thy face of old. Whence comest thou?"

Michael lifted the steel cap from off his brow, showing the bright locks curling round his fresh and ruddy face, and in a voice clear as a bell told all his story till he fell wounded in that dismal valley; then he said, "My lord, the tale of what came after none knoweth better than he who saved me from death and made me a man," and he pointed to the Sub-Prior.

"Speak on, then, father," said the King.

"My lord," went on the monk, "I, one day, was called by a poor charcoal-burner's lad to see his father, who was dying. As I bore the Sacrament with me in mine hands I bade the boy, who

was with me to guide me, ring the bell that all who passed that way might know what Holy Thing I carried. Well, by the edge of the pine wood we went, while through the twilight the bell sent a heavenly tinkling; but the lad began telling me of fears he had of elves who dwelt within the wood. I chid him for his foolishness, but as dawn drew near, our ears heard the galloping of a horse's hoofs, which struck terror into the lad.

"I smote my mule, and the boy and I went hastily forward; and as we went what should we find down by the stream but this my son, who seemed as though his days were done, for in his side there stood a knife, and from the wound ran out a stream of blood. Dismounting, I laid the poor youth upon my mule, and we passed down through the glade and reached the woodman's hut at last. A poor hut it was, built of wood, and by it stood a ruined cattle-shed, unroofed and old. Perchance, my lord, thou mayst know it. So I stanched the lad's wound, and afterwards ministered to the old man who had sent for me. Then back I went, and the next day sent one with drugs to attend to the lad, who was soon as well as if he never had had a wound.

"We took him into our house and taught him letters, and indeed before long he could read Latin as well as I, but he hath no wish to join our body, and being healthy and strong the Abbot says 'he shall serve God with heart and limb, not heart and voice.' Therefore, my lord, thou seest him armed with spear and sword, ready to defend the right. Ho, Michael! hast thou there with thee the fair-wrought knife I first saw deep in thy side? Show it now to the King, that he may know our tale is true."

Throughout the Prior's story the King sat leaning forward, his anxious face very pale, his eyes fixed on Michael. "Fair lord," he spoke in a harsh, low voice, "I fain would know what this young man is worth to you, for methinks he had better wear my badge and fight for me than loiter in your Abbey poring over books."

"O sire," answered the monk, "if you need him, he shall go."

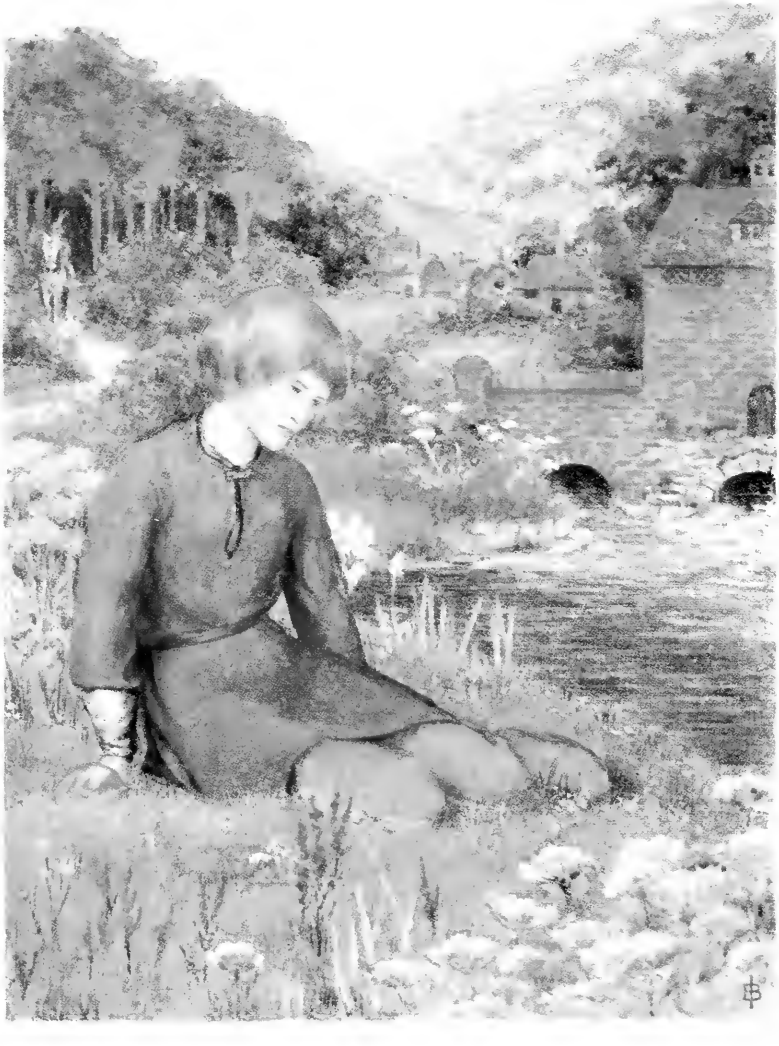
The King smiled a wan smile, then as in a dream he saw in Michael's hand the gleam of that same steel he remembered well; it was his own gift to Samuel, taken from his father's ancient chest that morning to do the evil deed. He saw the twining stem of gold and green, the white scroll with the black letters, "*Strike! for no dead*

man cometh back!" Once more he hardened his heart, and once more he was treacherous and fierce; and once more he fell.

The Abbot, after he had feasted, went away with all his folk; but Michael, clad in rich array, became the King's man.

For ten days the King waited, then he sent for Michael and said to him, "Friend, take now this letter from my hand and go south to my Castle of the Rose, where dwells my daughter, the Princess Cecily. It is a three days' journey; my captain Hugh shall go with thee the first day to put thee on thy way and tell thee which road thou hast to ride. Be careful that no man sees this letter until thou hast thyself given it into the hands of the High Steward of the Rose Castle. Be wise and wary, then, and this trust if well fulfilled may lead thee to higher fortune."

So Michael set out with Hugh, a big, rough man, ill-tempered and insolent. Now, if the King had hoped that Hugh and Michael would quarrel and fight on the way I know not, but Michael controlled his wrath against the fellow's scornful words. When they reached the cross-roads that led one west, one south, Hugh took off his feathered hat, bowed low in scorn, and said, "Fair sir, I must ride westward while you go southward, soon



to get an earl's coronet, I doubt not. Farewell, my lord."

Michael took scant notice of him, but spurred on betwixt the hedgerows till evening came on, when he drew rein at a small inn and slept peacefully there that night. In the early morning he started off, and rode on his way steadily throughout the day. After another night's rest at an inn, he began his third day's journey. A long time he rode across a windy tableland till he reached the edge and saw below him a beautiful valley, fair with golden sheaves, gay with green water-meadows, and bright blue streams and slopes of vine. Between the vineyards and the stream Michael saw the gilded towers of the Castle of the Rose, and knew he had come to his journey's end.

IV

Downward he went till he reached the stream; he passed the bridge, and soon saw the towers of the house and the gates thrown open wide, the drawbridge down over the moat overgrown with lilies amidst which the gold-scaled fishes lay, and on one side of the archway sat the warder dozing. Hearing the sound of Michael's horse, he rose, and with a lazy smile

said, "Ho, fair sir! abide, abide, and show why ye ride hither unto my lady's royal home."

"From the King I come," answered Michael, "as by my badge ye may well see, and I have letters here with me to give my lord the High Steward."

"Yea," said the man, "but now he feasteth in the hall, and sure I am he will not read thy letters till every guest has gone away, so thou must wait. Tie up thine horse near the gate, and thou shalt hear a song from me; or, if thou wilt, thou canst go and rest in the garden. Go over the drawbridge, then three stone steps lead to a path, and through the gilded wicket gate at the end lies the garden. I will not fail to come to thee when my lord High Steward has feasted."

So Michael passed through into the garden, and wandered to a fountain's side, and hung over the basin watching the fishes as he sang some song remembered from of old. Soon made drowsy by the warm autumn sun and his long ride, he cast himself down upon the ground and fell asleep.

Meanwhile into the garden had come the Princess, and with her a maiden whom she loved. In their walk they came near the fountain, and found Michael sleeping. The maid stepped forth and gazed down at him, then, with a smile, she

turned to Lady Cecily. "Hush! hush!" said she, "did I not say that he would come to woo thee in thy peaceful home before thy father brought him here? Come and behold him; have no fear, the great bell right in his ears would not wake him now. Come!" She caught the Princess's hand; the colour rose to Cecily's brow as she came near the sleeper, and when she saw him lying there she smiled to see her mate so fair, for she doubted not that it was her lover come alone to woo her in the disguise of a court-squire. With that thought, her love grew till it was pain to depart.

As she raised her eyes at last to her friend's face, she saw it was grave and sad, for while the Princess had been gazing at her lover the maiden had drawn from Michael's hand the King's scroll, which she held out now to Cecily, whispering, "Read, and do quickly what thou wilt. Sad! sad! such fair life to be spilt! Come farther first"; and they stepped back a pace or two, and Cecily read—

"*Lord Steward,*

"*On thee and thine may all good fall. The King sendeth greeting, and biddeth thee put to death his enemy who beareth this; and as thou holdest*

thy life dear, set thou his head upon a spear a good half-furlong from the gate, our coming hitherwards to wait.—So perish the King's enemies."

She read, and scarcely had her eyes seen clearly her father's name and seal than all love came into her heart, and pantingly she said, "Wait thou alone beside him, watch him carefully, and let him sleep if none draw nigh. If he wake, then hide him till I come again, when thou hast told him of this plot. If thou betrayest me, beware! for death shall be the least of all the ills that shall fall on thine head. But what do I say? thou art dear to me, and doubly dear now thou shalt be, but be wise, be wise!"

Swiftly she ran between the garden trees until she reached her own bower and quickly passed to her room. There, from between the leaves of a great book, she took a royal scroll, signed and sealed, but blank. Then with a hand that never trembled, she filled the scroll with these words, written with clerkly skill—

"*Unto the Lord High Steward, Sir Rafe,*

"*Who holdeth our fair Castle safe, greeting and health! O well-beloved, know that at this time we are moved to wed our daughter, so we send him, who*

bears this, our dearest friend, to be her bridegroom. Do thou ask nought of him, since well we know his race and great nobility and how he is most fit to be our son. Therefore make no delay, but wed the two upon the day thou readest this, and see that all do homage to him and do his bidding, as our heir."

She hastily cast the pen down, for she heard the people stirring in the hall, and enfolding it within a cover she sealed it with the royal signet, her father's own gift. Then swiftly down the stairs she ran, and reached the garden. She found her friend watching the sleeper and waiting anxiously for her return.

Hastily snatching the scroll from the Princess's hand, the maiden placed it in the sleeper's belt, then together they passed to the other end of the garden.

Cecily having come to the end of all her courage, trembled and felt faint, her parted lips were pale, her limbs quivered. Her friend took her hand and said, "Nay, Princess, fear not. All is safe, if thou wilt boldly face Sir Rafe." Then she hurried to the palace to fetch fruit and wine. On her way back she cast her eager eyes to the spot where he had lain, but found it empty, so she

sped on to the place where she had left Cecily faint and weak.

She made her eat and drink, and said, "See now thou dost not shrink from this thy deed; let love stay fear; for I say this day shall be thy happy day. What is it I remember that some old soothsayer did once tell strange things unto my lord the King, that on thy hand the marriage-ring should be set by no king, no emperor, but by one a peasant. What sayest thou?"

The Princess flushed red. "Such fables have I heard," she said. Just then a sound was heard of folk coming through the garden. "Be strong!" cried the maiden; "pluck up thy courage; speak little; all will be well."

Even as she spoke the green place was all ablaze with golden raiment of the lords, while Cecily listened to the High Steward's message, requesting her presence in the palace.

She rose and passed before them all to the hall, with head a little bent, nor did she raise it till she had reached the dais. Then she gathered heart to raise her eyes, and there beheld her love, clad indeed in her father's serving-dress, but proud and flushed and calm.

Their young eyes met; the rosy colour came

and went in her sweet cheeks and smooth bright brow, as Sir Rafe the Steward read the King's message. When it was finished, the Princess, with a serious but happy face, spoke to Michael—

"Prince, thou art welcome here, where all my father loves are dear, and full trust do I put in thee. Be as kind to me as I would be to thee, and find a happy life from day to day, till all our life is past away."

Eagerly he turned to her. "Surely I count it nothing to die for him who has brought me to this, and for thee who have given me such happiness, who dost look at me with such kind eyes and speak such music to mine ears."

Then, amid the ringing of the sweet marriage bells and the singing of heavenly carols, the two were wed.

But apart from this mirth and festivity sat one at home ill at ease, for tidings had been brought to him that he who was to have married his daughter had been slain in a street brawl.

So on a bright morning, the day on which the King was to have brought the bridegroom to his daughter, he set out to tell her of her loss. He came near the Rose Castle, and doubted not that he should soon see Michael's dead head looking down upon the highway.

As he drew rein he heard the sound of music, and drawing nearer the gate saw the pageant that awaited his coming. On each side stood maidens dressed in gold raiment, singing; then there came minstrels in coats of red, then the gaily dressed lords with their spears and swords, backed by the archers.

Quickly the crowd parted before him, and down the lane, hand locked in hand, passed Michael and Cecily, as fair as any on the earth, clad in royal robes and crowned. Behind them walked the chief lords with sheathed swords, bearing the banners of the kingdom.

The King was amazed, and scowled darkly. "Whence come ye?" he said. "What are ye? What play is this ye play to me?"

None answered. Cecily, white and faint, clutched Michael's hand and tried to speak, but could not. Then the King spoke again: "Sir Rafe, methinks this young man came here safely a week ago?"

"Yea, sire," he said, "and therefore the two I at once did wed, even as thy letters bade me."

The King said nothing, but for a moment sat with head bowed down in thought, then with smiling face he cast a look upward and cried aloud, "Shout for the happiness of these two!

And thou, fair lord," he said, turning to Sir Rafe, " who dost so well my every word, wear thou the collar of thy King and carry the banner of a duke."

Of Michael he said, " This mine heir shall bear my shield, carry my banner, wear my crown, ride equal with me through my town, sit on the same step of the throne—in nothing will I reign alone. Nor be ye with him discontented, for he is of an ancient name, the oldest the world doth hold—ages ago his line was born. Look, then, to have great happiness."

Then the people's shouting drowned his speech as he leapt from his horse, and taking in each hand a hand of the two lovers, stood with them on the flower-strewn way.

So, amid sweet song and music and shouts of joy, began the new King Michael's reign, nor will the poor folk see again a king like him on any throne.

IV

THE WRITING ON THE IMAGE

In half-forgotten days of old there stood within the city of Rome an image cut of cornel-wood, and on the upraised hand of it were written the words "PERCUTE HIC"—"*Strike here!*" but no one yet had known the reason why this was written so.

Thus, in the middle of the square, in the hot sun and summer air, the snowdrift and the driving rain, that image had stood for more than two hundred years. Men came and went, many an emperor and king passed away with glory or with shame, leaving little record of his name and no remembrance of his face; but the wooden image with the uplifted hand stayed on.

Now it chanced that to this place there came a man from Sicily who, when he saw the image, knew full well who had set it there in days long gone by; for this man had learned much strange lore in Egypt and in Babylon, and understood

many secret things. He knew what master of witchcraft had carved the image, and doubted not that it guarded some great spell, but could not tell what it might be. So day by day he would loiter on the way and watch the image carefully, well mocked of many a passer-by.

One day, at noon, he stood and gazed upon the slender finger raised against a cloudy sky, and thought, " 'Tis certain that the master who made thee so well by his wondrous art would have made thee speak, had he not thought that, by so doing, evil might be brought upon his spell."

As he spoke, from behind a cloud the noonday sun broke forth with watery light, casting cold shadows. Then the Scholar saw that from the pointing finger a short black shadow fell upon a certain spot of ground. Looking round to see no one was near, he went straightway to the place where the finger's shadow lay, and with his knife traced a little circle round the spot. This done, home he turned with throbbing head, and went straight to bed, sleeping until midnight. Then, when few men stirred, he armed himself with pickaxe and shovel and went to the now silent square.

He found the mark of his knife, and quietly,

with many a stroke, he broke the pavement, and with beating heart began to dig. From the hole he hastily cast out the earth and gravel till, at last, full shoulder high, his spade struck hard with a clang against some metal thing. Soon he found a brass ring, all green with rust, twisted, and great as a man's wrist, set in a plate of copper, on which were carved strange, unknown words, plain to see in spite of the rust; and flowering trees and beasts and wicked images.

The Scholar shuddered at these evil symbols, but he had little time to stop and think, so straightway on the ring he set his hand. Instead of needing all his strength as he thought, it came away easily, and there beneath was a winding staircase made of stone.

"If I come out from here alive," thought the man, "I shall live in wealth, for I look to find great treasures of some king. In a few days, what man shall know the needy Scholar, seeing me, the richest man in all the land? I will build a palace, with marble cloisters, and with trees and bubbling fountains; there, dwelling happier than the King, what lovely days may yet be mine! Fearless will I enter here, and meet my fate whate'er it be."

Now on his back he bore a bag to carry what

treasure he might find, and thus he began to go down the winding stair. He found the walls all painted fair with images of warrior, priest, king and queen. He could see them clearly, for lamps were hung up here and there of strange device, giving out a pleasant odour.

At last he reached a curtain on whose hem unknown words were written in letters of gold. Softly raising it, he beheld a large hall hung round with gold, and at the upper end he could see a glorious company sitting. He trembled, thinking they were no men but evil spirits, but while he waited, a cold blast of wind from the outer air blew out the lamps upon the stair, and all was dark behind him. He feared less to face those men than grope his way up the dark stair, so, raising the cloth, he entered.

Drawing nearer, he saw that they were bodies, dead and cold, attired in royal raiment, and looking as if they were alive. In the midst of the company sat a mighty man, an ancient king, with long grey beard flowing over a golden robe, and next beside him sat his queen in a flowery gown of green with a golden mantle, and glittering jewels of priceless worth round her neck and waist. On each side of these stood lords holding in their hands bread and wine ; behind them shone

the armour of the guards, and then the well-attired serving-men and minstrels. Over the royal throne was hung a lamp, although no flame was burning there, but within its golden frame was set a huge carbuncle, red and bright, that shone with such a light that the great hall was lit up clearly by it.

A little way aside, about six paces from the throne, stood an image made of brass and wood, in the likeness of a fully armed knight who pointed against the bright stone a huge shaft ready in a bow.

For a time the Scholar went tremblingly about the hall, moving nothing, wondering at such marvels, but still fearful of touching one jewel of their robes. But as he grew more used to them, he thought, " Swiftly the time goes by, and now, no doubt, the day draws nigh, and folk will be stirring; 'tis foolish to fear the dead."

He drew near the two royal bodies, whose lifeless brows still wore the crown, and midst the golden cups set down the patched leather bag from his back. Then, opening wide its mouth, he took up a golden cup the king's dead hand was resting on and placed it inside. Next he laid his fingers upon the neck of the queen and unclasped her jewelled collar, and placed it, with the two

crowns and other jewels from their rich gowns, in his sack.

He took their shoes and belts, brooches and rings, and cleared the board of all rich things, and staggered with them down the hall.

But as he went his eyes fell upon a wonderful green stone lying upon the hall floor all alone. "Though thou art not so great to add much to the weight of my sack," he muttered, "yet thou of thyself art rich enough to make my fortune. I will not leave thee." So he knelt down in the middle of the hall, thinking it would come easily into his hand, but it was stuck fast.

Fuming, he laid down his sack, and with both hands pulled lustily, but, as he strained, he cast his eye back to the dais. There he saw the bowman image begin to draw the mighty bowstring. Shrieking aloud for fear, he loosed his hold of the rich stone, and catching up his bag of gold, got to his feet. But before he could escape, the armed image of brass and wood drew his bow; forth the arrow flew and struck the middle of the great carbuncle, and instantly all was dark.

So there until the judgment-day this man must stay, for though he beat upon the walls, in the hope of finding some sign of the door, he never found it, since by some dreadful sorcery all was

sealed as close as it could be, and there amidst the marvels of that hall the Scholar found the end of all.

In the town on that same night, an hour before the dawn, there fell such a storm upon the place that not the oldest man could tell of such another. The image was utterly burnt, being stricken from the clouds above, and folk thought that the same thunderbolt had moved the pavement (down which the wretched man had gone). The plate was set again in its place, and the great rain had washed the earth down and so hidden any trace of the opening.

Soon the stones were all set straight again, and in the spot where the image of cornel-wood had kept its place for so many years there was set up a statue of great Jove himself, cut in white stone and thickly overlaid with gold; "which," so the story goes, "you may see unto this day, although indeed some lord or other, being in need, took every ounce of gold away."

V

THE FAIRIES' GIFTS

I

WITHIN a Danish city by the sea whose name, now changed, is all unknown to me, there was great mourning one fair summer eve, because the angels had carried a Queen's lovely soul to Paradise. Her lifeless body lay underneath a golden canopy, and beside it a King bowed in deepest misery. Within the darkened room lay a fair infant boy, harmless and loved, the King that was to be, although now so new to life.

The June evening was calm, the sky was clear with no sign of storm, the sea lay motionless, and if the beech wood stirred it was with the nestling of a bird in its thick leaves. But to the King on that sweet eventide there seemed no earth, no promise of heaven, no help, no God! only lonely pain.

Round the infant's cradle sat the nurses beguiling the time with stories of the departed

Queen. So passed the hours; the moon arose, and from the sea a little west wind blew, rustling the leaves like sudden rain. The night grew cold, and in deep silence the dawn drew nigh. Then from her place a nurse arose to light fresh tapers round about the dead Queen. The King raised his head and stared upon her as her sweeping gown glided over the floor, and as she lit the second candle she stayed her hand, her eyelids fell, and she seemed to sleep. Over the staring King sweet slumber began to creep too, the bitter lines of woe on his weary face grew softer, his eyelids drooped, his arms fell to his side, and moveless in their places sat the nursing women, held by some strong spell. Utter silence fell upon the mournful, glimmering room.

But now light footsteps coming up the stair and the sound of silken dresses trailing over the ground smote on the deathlike stillness, as through the room were wafted heavenly odours like the scent of rose and lily. Nearer drew the sound of fairy footsteps, until the door swung open noiselessly, and within the doorway stood what seemed to be a mass of sunlit flowers, so bright that beside them the candles looked pale and wan.

One by one, six fairies, crowned with gems

and clad in glorious raiment, passed into the room, and each in turn stepped lightly to where the cradle lay. The first laid a tender hand upon the babe and gently drew aside the soft clothes that covered him. Seeing him so fair and great, she smiled and stooped and kissed him, saying, "O noble child, take thou this gift from me to-day: to the time when life shall pass away from thee, no fear of death, no shame, shall stain thy name." So saying, she returned to her sisters.

Then one wearing a golden tunic of ringed mail came forth, upon whose brow there burned a crown of rubies. She took the babe, and somewhat frowning said, "This gift I give: that till thy limbs are laid at rest for ever, there shall never be lacking war and strife, so that thou mayst win for thyself a great name, and by thy good deeds shalt gain pardon for thy sin."

With that, another, who unseen had drawn near the cradle, said with a joyous smile, "To thee I give this gift: that while thou dost live amidst all this turmoil, thou shalt win the game; to thee defeat and shame shall be but idle words."

Then back they turned, and the fourth said, "Take this small gift from me, it is all I have to

offer: thou shalt be gentle of speech and first of all men in courtesy; a little gift this is after the promises of fame and bliss."

Then toward the babe the fifth fair woman went; grey-eyed she was, and simple, with eyes bent upon the floor. Her red lips were parted, and over her sweet face spread a faint flush as daintily in her thin gown she tripped to the cradle and laid her fingers on the child. "O little one," she said, "as long as thou shalt look upon the sun will fair women love thee."

Then she passed, and by the cradle stood the sixth and last, the fairest of them all. For a while she gazed upon the child, then raised her hand. "Ogier," she cried, "when thine earthly life is over and war and strife have given thee all their fame, then shalt thou come to me, and we will be glad together in the happy country where I dwell. Ogier, my love that is to be, farewell!"

She turned, and they passed out as they came. They reached the palace gate, which opened of itself for them, and speedily they gained the shore of the murmuring sea. As they stood in silence, gazing westwards, they vanished into air.

In the room still burned the flickering candles, and the dreary folk awoke from their trance, but

knew nothing of what had passed. Through the half-opened casements now there blew a sweet fresh air, smelling deliciously of flowers and sea mingled together, and from the sun the spreading light began to shine on the fair June blossoms ; and thus Ogier began his noble life.

Great things he suffered, great delights he had ; he gave good deeds in return for evil, he ruled over kingdoms, and on many a shore he won for himself a name. Great joys he knew and many sorrows ; he had a tender wife who died, and a well-loved son whose little day of promise soon was done. Yet he bravely struggled on, not giving himself over to grief and discontent when he saw his own end drawing nigh.

It was evening, such another eve as that on which the fairies' gifts were made. The sun was sinking in the west, the sky was bright and clear, no clouds lay about the golden circle of the sun, and underneath was the huge sea glittering with the golden flame. In the midst of it stood the Loadstone Rock, a rugged island, not known on any sailor's chart, though worn-out seamen will speak of it round the fireside on a winter's night, when all is safe and warm within, and the wind howls without. No merchant would knowingly steer his course that way, but against their will

some folk are driven there; then all skill against this evil rock is vain and hopeless. For the keel as if by a giant's hand is drawn into the rock and wedged there, and the crew, if they escape the surging waters, die of famine, mocked, so they say, by night with images of noble castles among groves of trees, and by day with sounds of merry music and singing.

The sun is sinking now below this hopeless sea, and all the sky is bright with the rising moon. By its light can be seen the bones of generations of these luckless ones scattered about the rock. To-night, near the sea, sits one alive, patiently awaiting his death. He is old and white-haired, clad in royal raiment decked with gold, but tarnished with the waves and rough salt air. He is huge, with a noble fair face, though toil has furrowed his cheeks. Listen! He speaks!

"God, Thou hast made me strong! nearly seven weeks have passed since we were wrecked upon this rock, and it is five days now since my last companion died with my last piece of bread between his teeth, and yet I am not dead. Yea, but for this wreck I had still been strong enough to end my life on some great battlefield.

"Get thee another leader, Charlemaine, for

thou shalt look to see my shield in vain when the heathen stand thick as the corn they tread in thy fair fields of France. And now, O God, am I alone with Thee; it seems a little thing indeed to give this life up, since it must go some time. Behold, I thank Thee, that Thou hast made this end so sweet."

What man is this who, weak and worn and old, thus gives up his life within that dreadful island, and can smile on his coming death?

Alas! this man, so battered and so worn, is none but he who, on that summer morn, received such promises of glorious life—Ogier the Dane.

II

The moon was bright, and Ogier slept peacefully on the Loadstone Rock, but with the first faint light of day he awoke, and smiling, muttered, "Nay, no more, now some other form of strife," for he had waked from dreams of his old life, and in his sleep had passed once more through St. Omer's guarded gate and saw the state of a triumphant king.

While he sat and waited for the day, a sudden light streamed across the bare rock, and some soft far-off music fell on his ears. He did not move,

but murmured, "This is death, an easy thing like this to yield my breath, awake, yet dreaming, with no sounds of fear; God, I thank Thee!" With that last word he seemed to hear his own name whispered as though the wind had borne it past. He stood up with sunken head, and in a low, trembling voice said, "Lord, I am ready, whither shall I go? I pray Thee show me some token." As he spoke he turned, and in the east he beheld a light as bright as day. Slowly he went towards it, still hearing those strains far-off and low; still that bright light streamed over the rocks, until at last he came to the other shore of the dreary island, then the music ceased and the strange light grew softer. Beneath its waning brightness Ogier saw a mighty palace set about with gold in the midst of green meadows and groves of summer trees. But as he gazed it faded from his sight, and only his sea-girt prison-island remained in the moon's grey light.

He gazed wistfully over the sea and said, "Alas! when will this pass and leave my soul in peace? Must I still dream of life that once seemed so dear? Here will I sit until Death come to me."

Then down he sat and covered up his face, but could not rest: the hope of life was strong

within him. If he could but live! He arose and paced along the shore and looked out seaward for the blessed light, but saw nothing except the old sad sight,—the ceaseless tumbling of the grey billows, the white spray foaming against the mass of broken timbers, the bones of the unfortunate ones once cast like him upon this deadly isle. He stopped his pacing in a little while, clenched his mighty hands and set his teeth, and gazing at the ruin underneath he swung off from the bare cliff's jagged brow. Wavering on a slippery ledge without a handhold, then stoutly clinging with hands alone, he hung over the dreadful cliff, caring nothing if thus his life should end. But safely he descended, and as there was no beach beneath, nothing but the sea from which the rock rose steep and bare, he stood unsteadily upon the wrecks, amid the clamour of the waves and the washing to and fro of beams and staves.

Dizzy with hunger and dreamy with distress and days of fear and loneliness, he seemed to hear the battle's roar as in days of old. He shouted and leapt from beam to beam, and yet kept his footing amidst their tossing. Quickly on from wreck to wreck he passed till he reached the outer one, and there stood a moment un-

steadily amidst the spray. He raised his sword and poised himself to meet his coming death still looking out to sea, but as he gazed he heard again over the waves that heavenly strain, and in the dimness saw something bright coming towards him across the waste of waters, now hidden, now raised aloft.

Then at his feet a boat was cast, gilded inside and out and well arrayed with soft cushions. Ogier looked at it doubtfully one moment, then sheathing his sword, he stepped in, but found no rudder there, nor any oars. While he pondered the boat began to move, a drowsiness came over him, and he knew no more.

He woke up on a sunny day to find his little barque moored to an overhanging tree at the edge of a fair tideless sea. Nothing was to be seen of his once sad abode of death and misery, only the wide and empty ocean. From the golden cushions he arose, and wondering if he had come to Paradise he stepped ashore.

The place was very fair, field-flowers grew underneath his feet, and blossoms showered down on his head. But as he walked a sense of feebleness came over him, his limbs grew stiff, his eyes dim, and all memory began to fail, as down a little path he dragged his faltering feet. Still he

crept along, and came at last to a gilded wicket, and through this into a beautiful garden. A little farther yet he staggered on, till he reached a fountain over which two whitethorn bushes shed their sweet blossoms. There he sank down, and laid his weary head on the mossy ground and slept. In his dreams he heard sweet music and saw a sweet face bending over him, while a voice murmured—

"Ogier, sweet friend, why hast thou tarried long?" He felt his head raised and gently laid in some kind arms, then the sweet voice went on: "Thou art come to me at last; not yet shall our life together end. Why do I linger ere I give thee again the beauty of youth I promised thee so many years ago?"

"Alas!" he said, "who art thou? Art thou she I laid to rest beneath the hawthorn blossoms whose name now I have forgotten, yet it seems but yesterday I saw thee with our little son? Ah! mine eyes grow dim, did I forget thee in the days gone by? Then let me die, that we may meet again."

He tried in vain to move from her: a kiss fell upon his forehead, and slim fair fingers moved to his mighty sword-hand and there set on some ring. Still he could not speak, and once more sleep weighed down his eyelids.

He awoke trembling, but dared not at first arise, although he felt no pain as of old. But while he lay and hoped, he heard that gentle voice once more: "Yea, thou mayst well rejoice! Thou livest still, apart from every earthly ill; wilt thou not love me who have done this?"

Then Ogier rose, not like a man whose span of earthly life is nearly run, but as he might have risen in old days. Beside him was the fountain, and by it stood a fair woman, fresh and delicate, in grey flowing robes, with gemmed sandals on her feet and a fresh rose-wreath round her head, and on her breast she wore a large red ruby.

"Who art thou? How am I so suddenly cured of all my ills, feeling as mighty now as when I fought in days gone by?"

"Ogier," she said, "draw near. Many years ago, beside the sea, when thou wert born, I gave my love to thee. Now, come nearer, and I will tell thee wherein lies the spell which has made this happy change on thee. Behold that ring upon thy finger, thy keen eyes may trace faint figures worked upon the gold; my dying father gave it me, though he told me not its history, but I know that it can make thee even as thou art now. The country thou hast come to is Avallon, and I am Morgan le Fay."

Through the whispering trees she led him to a wondrous house, where flitted to and fro crowds of lovely maidens with flowers and music. They passed through the door into a hall wherein was a fair throne, and there she bade him sit. Then from out the crowd came one lovelier than them all, holding in her slender hands a crown of gold which she raised and set upon his head. Thenceforth new life came to Ogier, and he dwelt in the happy land of Avallon a hundred years.

III

Think that a hundred years have now passed by, that you are in France, in Paris, where about each guarded gate are gathered knots of anxious people. A cruel war is wasting the land, the heathen are besieging its cities and burning its ports, and crowds have collected and press round each new-comer to learn fresh news. Is Harfleur safe ? Is it true that the bridge that guards the Seine is burnt ? Such questions did they ask as fresh men came hurrying in, and very scant tidings did they get.

Just before sunset, amidst these men at last came one fully armed, followed by two stout men who looked with doubtful eyes upon their

master, who was indeed noteworthy. His armour was of ancient fashion, his face was bronzed as though by burning climes, but lovely as a god. His grey eyes were solemn, and his hair like ruddy gold. A mighty man he looked, and far taller than any who were fighting the heathen that day.

At the gates the warders stopped him and asked his name and from what city he came. He showed his pass and said that men called him now the Ancient Knight, and that he was come from St. Omer. He gazed down on the thronging street as if amazed, and looked wonderingly at the guard. "Saint Mary!" he cried, "do such men as ye fight with the heathen from over the sea? 'Tis no wonder ye are lost. Not such were those who fought with me."

From the crowd came a mocking voice: "Be merry, masters, fear nothing; surely we have good help here. For here is Charlemaine come off his tomb to save his faithful city from its doom."

At the name of Charlemaine the warrior turned to the mocking voice and seemed as if he would speak, but with a half-sigh soon sank back again into his dream, shook his horse's rein, and silently went on upon his way.

This was Ogier. How had he come again to war and ravage, to his ancient home? Did he grow weary and wish to strive once more with foolish men for worthless things, or is fair Avallon sunk in the sea and all that glory gone?

Nay, this is how it happened. One day, Morgan le Fay came to him and said, "Ogier, thy name is growing dim in the world; the heathen are once more gathering in the fair land of France that I love so well, and none can drive them back. Wilt thou help? Canst thou once more set up thy banner to the wind? Thou shalt win greater glory for this than thou hast ever gained before; for men are dwindled in heart and frame, and the land holds now no such name as thine when thou wert there."

From his calm eyes there gleamed a fire. "Choose thou for me," he answered, "thou art the wisest; it is better perhaps to dwell with thee in this peaceful place than in that old land to fight and die."

"Nay," said she, "as to dying, that shall never be while thou keepest my ring. And now behold I take from thee thy crown of gold, for thou must be the same Ogier whose ship was cast on the Loadstone Rock; yet thou shalt

still have thy youthful body, and I will guard thy life from every ill."

So was it done, and Ogier well armed was borne away by some strong spell while he slept, and set upon the Flemish coast. From thence he journeyed to St. Omer, often causing great mirth among the countryfolk by his attire, and still more so when he asked strange questions concerning men and things for long years dead.

Now through the streets of Paris he rode, and abode that night at a certain hostel. Before he left next day he saw a book on a table, and opening it began to read, at first in a lazy mood, then with growing interest; for it told of the deeds of men whom once he knew well, and of his own deeds, true stories mixed with lies. But he must needs go on with his changed life. The Queen was then gathering men to send to the good King, who was being besieged at Rouen and was praying for help. A mighty muster was made of weak and strong and brave and timid before the royal palace, and thither on this morning Ogier went. When he saw the ancient building rise up great and fair before him as in other days, and the bright sun's rays glittering on gathered helmets and spears, he

began to feel as in the long-past years, and his heart stirred within him.

The Queen came and took her seat beneath a canopy, with lords and captains standing round her. A mighty shout arose, and the knights one by one swore fealty and learnt what service they had to do. Ogier made his way through the crowd, and quickly came to the place where the Queen sat. Men made way for him, fearing him, for not only was he huge of limb and dangerous, but something in his face struck men with awe.

Stepping forth, he knelt before her feet and took her hand to swear homage, as was the custom. He raised his eyes to hers, and saw a woman fair indeed and tall, with loving eyes cast down and a frown upon her fair brow.

"Thy name thou tellest not," she said, "nor from what land thou art."

"Lady," he said, "from what far land I come I well might tell thee, but for long I have dwelt in another home and its name have I forgotten now, forgotten utterly who were my companions and what deeds they did. Therefore my first name shall be hid, and my first country. Call me on this day the 'Ancient Knight,' and let me go my way."

He rose, and as slowly he turned from her high seat, she said, "O Ancient Knight, come presently to me, when we have finished this muster, and thou shalt have thy charge and due command for freeing this wretched land from our foes."

But as he slowly went away, a squire of the Queen came after him and bade him go with him now to the palace and wait for the Queen's return. He led him to a postern gate that Ogier knew so well in days of old. It was worn now, and the bright gold and colours upon the shields were faded. Through the well-known garden they came to the palace where once reigned Charlemaine, and there in the hall Ogier sat again and ate and drank. It seemed to him a dream from which presently he would awaken and find himself on the brown rocks of the Loadstone Isle.

Wishing to be alone, he passed into the garden and sat down, striving to remember what had happened since he lay on the island waiting for death, until at last sweet sleep fell upon his wearied spirit, and on the afternoon of that fair day he lay beneath the trees forgetting all.

Meanwhile, affairs of state being done, the Queen went through the gardens with one of her women, seeking for Ogier. At last she

found him sleeping on the daisy-sprinkled ground, dreaming of other days. The Queen gazed on him for a while, then turning to her companion, who was old and grey, said, "What means he by calling himself the 'Ancient Knight'? It is ill suited to such as he."

"Hush, my lady, he begins to move," said her aged companion; "see, his armour is of a pattern of old days; none know him; thy squire just said he asked about the state of men long dead. Look, seest thou not that ring upon his finger how it is worked with figures upon the gold? God grant he is not a spirit of evil!"

"Thou speakest foolishly," answered the Queen; "this man is come to fight for us against our enemies."

Then the old waiting-woman went down upon her knees by the sleeping knight, and with light fingers drew the wonderful ring from his hand. Before she could rise, the change in Ogier began. His golden hair turned white, his smooth cheek wrinkled, and his light breathing turned to struggling for his breath, while on his shrunken lips lay the hand of death. The Queen grew pale as she looked, and began to weep as she thought of her own beauty coming to such an end.

He opened his eyes and strove in vain to

speak, then he tried to move his hand as if seeking for his lost ring. All the while the old woman gazed on them with an evil smile, then holding the ring towards the Queen she said, "Why weepest thou? Take this ring, thou shalt then see the struggling world go vainly past, while thy beauty remains unchanged"; and she set the ring upon her finger.

But as the Queen saw the life in Ogier ebbing quickly away, she knelt down and murmured piteously, "Ah, wilt thou love me if I give it thee, and thou growest young again?" And hastily she thrust the ring upon his finger, then rose and stood a little way apart.

The elder woman cast a look of scorn at her as she pointed to Ogier, who now began to stir. Fair and young he rose from the ground, and cast a puzzled look around, like one just waked from sleep in a strange place. Soon his grey eyes rested upon the Queen, who smiled and said, "O Ancient Knight, thou sleepest, then, when through this poor land march the heathen men unmet of any but my King and Lord."

"Queen," he said, "command me. I pray thee pardon my sleeping, for I would that I might never sleep again than have such wretched dreams as I have now had."

With a blush that made her lovelier than before, she said, "Then may I too have pardon for a dream: last night in my sleep I saw thee King of France, and thou and I were sitting at some great festivity. O Ancient Knight, if I then read my dream aright, thou art come here to be our help and to give my husband back to me. Come, deliverer of my throne and land, and I will give thee command among my valiant men."

In the council-hall that day the Ancient Knight showed such wisdom that he was given command of one wing of the great army that set out from Paris on a May morning, the Queen in fair attire watching them as they rode forth. As Ogier passed, she cast down a wreath of flowering whitethorn to him and bade him farewell.

Before they could reach the gates of Rouen, news came that the King had been slain by an arrow and his men hopelessly beaten. But Ogier fell at last upon the foe, and completely scattered them in a great battle, so that when he returned to Paris once more he was welcomed by the people as their deliverer.

For a year he waged war on the heathen, till the land was clear of them; then the people chose him for King, and when May-time came again he was to be crowned and marry the fair Queen.

The day dawned on which he should be wed and crowned, and Ogier lay on his bed in the palace half asleep, half awake. In that sweet hour he heard a voice that cried, "Ogier, Ogier!" and strange the name sounded to him, for he had lost all memory of his former days on earth. Opening his eyes, he looked around. "Whom callest thou?" he said; "for I am Charles of France and shall be King to-day. A year ago they called me the 'Ancient Knight'; who is this thou callest 'Ogier,' and who art thou?"

A sigh as of one grieved came from some place near, and a soft voice spoke again: "This Ogier was once great amongst men, and many were his brave deeds when Charlemaine ruled in this land. When all his conquests were finished he left the world which was still ringing with his name. These things did Ogier, and these things didst thou, for thou art Ogier. Dost thou remember me, even if thou dost not remember the time before thou camest to our happy country?" As she spoke his eyes saw a lovely woman, daintily clad, standing beside him. It was Morgan le Fay.

"Love," said she, "I am here to bring thee home; thou hast done well all that thou camest

to do. Take this gift"; and she held out to him a glittering crown.

"Ogier," she cried, "arise and put on thee thy royal robes, for we must pass over many a sea this morn."

He rose and clad himself in the glittering tunic worn by Charlemaine, with the golden crown and mantle and the sceptre in his right hand. Morgan le Fay raised the earthly crown from his head and laid it on a pillow, saying, "Lie there, O crown of Charlemaine, worn by a mighty man, and worn in vain because he died. A better crown I have for my love's head, whereby he yet shall live when all whom he helped are dead." Then on his head she set her own wondrous crown, and said, "Forget! Forget! Forget all weary things and think of happiness."

At that touch he rose; a happy light gleamed in his eyes, and he remembered. "O love, how came we here?" he said. "What are we doing in this land of Death and Fear? Have I not been away from thee a long weary time? Let us return."

She took him by the hand and said, "Come, love, I am not changed"; and they moved to the door. Through the sleeping palace they swiftly passed. At the threshold of the gate they paused,

and Ogier gazed for the last time upon the rippling Seine. He heard the rush of the swift stream against the bridge-piers. All seemed a dream. His work was over, his reward was come. Why should he loiter longer from his home?

One moment the low sun shone on them, then the place was empty; they were gone, how I know not, but this I know indeed, that in whatever trouble the fair land of France has been since then, no more the sword of Ogier has she seen.

VI

THE GOLDEN APPLES

I

MANY, many years have passed away since King Eurystheus sat on the throne of fair Mycenæ, an ancient town of Greece. On a day in those olden times a merchant-ship of Tyre was starting at noon on its homeward journey from the quiet Grecian bay. The summer noon was fresh, a soft wind blew and ruffled lightly the peaceful sea, sail was unfurled and the anchor was being raised, when a shout rang from the shore as though the ship were hailed. The master bade the sailors stay, thinking perchance they had sailed without some needful thing, when lo! from over the steep cliff's side came two who seemed in haste to gain the ship.

Soon they drew nigh, and he who first came down to the water's edge was a man huge of limb, grey-eyed, with crisp-curled hair. Over him was cast a lion's skin wrought with gold,

and in his hand he bore a mighty club with bands of steel.

Panting, there followed him a grey old man, bearing a long staff and clad in gown of blue; very feeble he looked, hollow-cheeked and pale, who, when he came to his companion's side, said faintly, "Now, do that which thou shouldst do; this is the ship." In the other's eye a smile gleamed, and he called out merrily—

"Masters, folk tell me that ye make for Tyre, and after that, still nearer to the sun, and since Fate bids me look to die by fire, I would fain begin now to know what the heat is like. How say ye, will ye bear us o'er the sea?"

"What is thy name?" said the master; "and know that we are merchants and for nought give nought; what wilt thou pay? Thou seemest full rich."

The old man muttered, stooped down and caught at something in the sand.

"It is even as I thought," said the younger, "when I set out from home." Then to the sailors he said, "As to my name, perchance in days to come thou shalt know that, but take this toy and call me the Strong Man." And as he spoke he took from his arm a huge circlet

of gold and cast it on the deck, where it lay gleaming in the sun.

The elder held out a wrinkled hand wherein there shone two pearls great and fair, and offered them to the master. "As for my name," he said, "call me Shepherd of the Shore this time, and for more knowledge you must bide a while."

Wild doubts rose in the seaman's heart, but he thought it best to bid them come aboard. Then the Strong Man caught up the elder in his arms, and making nothing of the added weight strode through the breakers to the ship, and catching at the rope they threw to him, swung up into the ship. Wonderingly the sailors drew round to look upon his mighty limbs, the mightiest ever seen.

The wind freshened and blew to the south-east; the Strong Man stood silent at the prow, gazing with wide eyes out to sea, but the old man sat in the stern telling the sailors tales of wondrous things of the realms beneath the sea, of the nymphs and the dolphins, and speaking as one who had beheld all the wonders of the deep.

On the fourth day about sunrise the watch cried out from the mast that he saw land, at which the Strong Man cast a look askance at the

elder, and took his stand near the prow and gazed beneath his hand at the scarce-seen shore, till clouds arose and hid it from his sight.

The moon grew cold, then small rain began to fall, the wind dropped, and the men's hearts sank, for their barque seemed helpless now. Then suddenly the sails flapped, ropes beat wildly about, and down came the great east wind, and the ship ran straining through the seas to the westward.

Scarce knowing night from day, they drove through the wild sea; the Strong Man worked with mighty hands, but on the prow, heeding not the weather, stood the elder, calm and silent, swaying with the ship. In the sailors' hearts were fear and despair; they thought they should drive on to the world's edge, and then to death.

But beneath the fearless eyes of the Strong Man they toiled on; he sang to the wind and spread his arms to meet the curling waters as over the deck the waves lashed, blinding the drenched seamen. He gazed up at the lightning, and frowned not at the terrible thunder, till the men at last came to think that their guests must be gods and they were being whirled to the end of time.

On the tenth day the storm began to die, and fair and quietly the next morn broke. The bright sun came back again; as the days passed their fear grew less; and, as before, the elder man sat and told them tales of bygone years. Still the Strong Man paced up and down the deck, or stood alone on the prow and stared out westward.

Now, when twenty days were passed, they saw a new land. At first cloudy mountains rose high from the sea, then a green shore spread fair below them. Darkness fell before they could set their eager feet upon it, and all night their ship lay as in a deep stream, for there the wide green sea was tideless.

In the morn they could see a furlong off a long brazen wall that gleamed in the morning sun. The Strong Man stood ready to leap on shore as the plank shot out. With a great shout he stood on the blossoming grass, waiting for the old man, who slowly followed.

The crew held back; they knew now they had been brought over the sea by these strange men to fulfil some purpose, and in their hearts they thought, "Perchance we yet shall live if, meddling nought, we stay here till these twain come back."

II

But among them were two fellows bold and young who with prying eyes went ashore, and at a gentle pace followed the strangers, who had turned towards the gleaming wall. Fair wrought it was, as though with bricks of brass, with images upon its face of stories long ago past. On they went; the birds sang sweetly from the thicket up above, and unknown flowers bent beneath their feet; the very air seemed laden with sweet scent. Slowly they went, till the two stayed before a strangely wrought and iron-covered door. They stopped too, till there rang a mighty shout, as the Strong Man raised his steel-bound club and drove it against the iron door, shattering it to the ground.

He entered, but his companion stayed, leaning against a tree-trunk, as they thought. The two sailors faltered, then went on again, and it seemed they must have dreamed of the old man; for now, as the sunlight streamed full upon the tree he had been leaning on, they saw him not, only a slim green lizard flitted there amidst the dry leaves.

Through the doorway they peered and saw a fair garden, and there the Strong Man walked

along a narrow grass path, thrusting aside the blossoming boughs as he passed. Then presently he gave a joyous cry, and hastened on as though the end drew nigh; women's voices were heard mingling with a noise that filled them with fear.

Yet on they went, till the path ended in a wide space of green, a clear streamlet flowed from out a marble basin, and close by that grew a slim-trunked tree, and on a bough hanging low over the water were three apples of red-gleaming gold.

About the tree were three damsels, risen now to meet the Strong Man. But midst their delicate limbs, and all around the tree-roots, gleaming blue-black wound a great serpent. It looked forth with glittering eyes, and hissed above the speech the maidens were murmuring softly to each other.

The Strong Man stood with eager eyes in the green space leaning on his club, and in a friendly voice spoke: "O daughters of old Hesperus the Wise, well have ye kept your guard here; but time tries the will of gods, and to my hand you must this day give the gold fruit of your land."

Then spoke the maidens in a voice sweet as the west wind of a summer noon: "Ah me!

what matters to us the changing mind of men or gods? Touch not the fruit! Look at thy death, envenomed, swift and cold!" And they pointed to the coiled serpent which moved nearer to them as they spoke.

"So be it," answered the Strong Man; "the Fates that drive me on shall slay me or shall save. Let your dread servant loose!"

Immediately, like a pillar of black smoke, swift and ever changing, the serpent writhed round him, body and limb. Closer the coils drew, quickly the forked tongue darted; but he stood firm, and with godlike fury flung it rattling to the ground. From its torn throat and crushed head there flowed a stream of blood along the grass, while his victor stood above him panting with fury. Soon his anger passed, and with a happy smile he turned to where the apples hung golden over the water.

Silent and motionless stood the three maidens; no change came over their faces as he stretched his hand aloft to the sacred tree. He drew down the wind-stirred bough and took the apples, then let it spring away, as he said—

"I bless this fateful land; good be with it, nor is it worse for this dreadful creature's death; still shall ye sit watching the swallow

flit over the daisies; and now, behold! in memory of all this take ye this girdle, that when hereafter ye talk of days and men ye may remember how the Theban man, the son of Jove, came over the waters."

Their faces changed not; they gazed upon him without a word as he turned and went away, carrying the three golden apples.

When the girdle on the ground was cast, the two fellows who had been watching hurried towards the door, and as they passed across the fallen leaves they saw not the old man, but on the spot wandered aimlessly about a poor blind mole.

Swiftly they went to their companions, and had only time just to say, "Be of good cheer, we may yet reach our own land in safety," when they beheld the guests drawing near, and much bewildered were the two fellows to see the old man.

When they were aboard, the elder cried, "Up sails, my masters! Fair is now the wind, and it is not good to dwell here longer."

As he spoke a wind sprang up, and the ship with its now joyous crew sped on. The Strong Man was merry with the rest, while the elder sat with them and told tales of past times; but

the sailors saw that his face was changed, no more wan and grey, but glorious, wise, and strong.

At last, when six days had passed, he said, "Come, hearken now, and I will tell you a tale that will seem a marvel when told by you to your sons in days to come. Take heed and tell it when ye reach your home.

"Living in the world there is a king's son who hath won much fame by great deeds. His name is Hercules, and even ye Asian folk must have heard of him.

"Now, a month ago, this Hercules was bid by a certain King Eurystheus get gifts from a land whereon no mortal foot had ever fallen, beyond the misty wall of unknown waters.

"Pensively Hercules walked by the sea-shore, and at dawn came to a bay where the sea ebbed far, and left wastes of sand, walled by great grey cliffs. Then he looked up and wonderingly stood there; for strange things lay upon the strand: sea-lions, sea-horses, sea-kine, sea-boars, sea-men with wondrous hair, and in their midst lay a man who seemed a god, while round him clad in sea-webs glassy green were the sea-maidens. For a moment he stared at the strange sight, then with careful steps he went till he stood over the sleeping sea-god and cried, 'Hail, O Nereus!

lord of hill and dale, arise and wrestle! I am Hercules!' And mightily he cast himself on him. Nereus cried out in a shrill voice, and immediately that sleeping crowd glided down into the grey billows, while the two wrestled on the sea-shore alone.

"Soon the sea-god found that his bodily strength was nothing in dealing with the son of Jove, so, using his magic art, he quickly changed into a leopard, then into a hugging bear. Finding this of no avail, he changed himself to the smallest fowl of the air, then to a wriggling eel; still Hercules held him. From that he changed to a thin green snake, and at last to a fly, the smallest that may be found. Then earth and heaven seemed wrapped in one huge flame, from the midst of which there came a voice: 'Kinsman, and stout heart, thou hast won the day, what wouldst thou have of me?' And the roaring flame faded to an old man small and grey, who sat down wearily upon the sand, saying, 'I know thy tale, thou art worthy of help; come now, a short way hence there will depart a ship of Tyre for the warm southern seas; let us aboard, her course shall be according to my will.'

"Then up rose Hercules, merry of face though hot and panting still, and together they made

for the sea-shore. Ye well know the rest. Your sails are somewhat rent, your kinsfolk and friends are wearying for you, but ye shall gain a friend if, at your journey's end, ye raise a temple bedecked with gold in kindly Nereus' praise on the farthest cape where the wild goats tread."

Breathless the men waited for these last words, about the masts flew moaning birds hovering long-winged and white; and now before their straining, anxious eyes the old man faded out into the air, and from his place flew forth a sea-mew fair. Then they turned to the Mighty Man Hercules and waited till he should speak.

"Nought ill have ye done in helping me to find what I did seek; but now light the fire upon the prow and offer sacrifice to Nereus." So did they, and would have honoured Hercules in the same way, but he laughed and said, "Nay, not yet the end is come; long life lies before me first, with its change and wrong."

So fair along the watery ways they sped, nor failed at their return to tell their tale in ancient Tyre, nor to offer sacrifice in the temple they built to the sea-god 'on the farthest cape where the wild goats tread.'

VII

THE FOSTERING OF ASLAUG

I

ASLAUG was a little orphan girl of royal birth. When her mother died she left her to the care of her old foster-father, a great lord, bidding him shield her from her enemies who dwelt in the land.

For a time the mother's death stunned the old man; he would sit by his porch for a long time without saying a word, then he would rise and draw his sword, gazing on the thin-worn edge and muttering, "Smooth cheeks, sweet hands, and art thou dead? I thought to see thee once more."

A few days passed by, and now he would spend hours by himself in his smithy, working at some mysterious craft. For a long while he worked alone, but on the tenth day he took in little Aslaug, then three years old. Evening

came, and as they did not return, a fear fell on his household lest some ill had befallen them.

Next morning came, and still they were not to be found. The smithy door stood wide open, the forge was cold, and the hammering tools lay on the floor with rules and chips and shavings of hard wood. After long searchings, the good folk came to think that the god Odin had called their lord to his last home, and it was not strange to them that he had taken the sweet little maiden with him, seeing how he loved the child.

But the old man was not dead; he had set out on a long journey with the little girl, meaning to take her to a place of safety. See him as he bends weary steps over trodden ways and wild paths, wide-faced, thin-cheeked, his white hair falling long from a broad brown slouched hat; a sword hangs by his side, and at his back is slung a huge harp, not of fair workmanship certainly, but of a weight few men could carry. With slow steps he comes to a clear space in a wood on a calm, sunny afternoon.

At last the huge old warrior stood and looked about him doubtfully, who, when he saw nothing living near him save a blue-winged jay and a soft squirrel, and in the grass a watchful hare, unslung his harp and knelt down there beside it. For a

little while he handled the hollow frame with a smile of cunning, and behold! the thing opened as if by some secret spring. There, within the hollow, clad in gold-fringed garments, lay the golden-headed child Aslaug, asleep and rosy; but she smiled as the old lord touched her face with his brown hand, and woke up free from any fear, and stretched her hands out towards him.

He sat down in the green place, holding the child in his arms. Then he set her down amid the flowery grass, and watched her pass from flower to flower in childish glee. He reached out thoughtfully for his harp, and began to play strange sharp notes which made the child stop in her play, startled by the wild music. Then a change came over the strings, merry sounds tinkled sweetly forth, and Aslaug danced till the tune grew fuller and stronger and all the wood seemed filled with sound. Her dance amid the flowers grew slower then, and sadder the music grew, until at last all sound passed away, and the little one nestled softly to him on his knee.

Soon through the wood came the sound of a mighty horn. Quickly from beneath his cloak the old man drew a golden phial and set it to her ruddy lips, then silently he laid the drowsy child in the harp's hollow place. Hastily he

shut the harp, raised it high upon his shoulder, set his sword ready to hand, and with no word stalked off along the forest glade. On he strode, still swifter as the day wore away, until at last the night closed round him as the wood that he was hurrying through grew thinner. When he gained the top of a hill he felt the sea-breeze meet him and heard the surf beat upon the beach.

He stopped and peered round through the gathering dark, and saw what seemed a spark along the hill's ridge. Thither he turned, until he came to the door of a lonely, poor-looking hut. Knocking, he was bidden to come in, and entering stood with blinking gaze before a fire's bright blaze.

Crouching over it there sat a woman all alone, very old and poor: her face was pinched with care, and she wore a sour, angry look; her lips were thin; her eyes, of a whitish-blue, looked fierce yet sullen. She rose as the old lord entered, and stood, a tall, gaunt creature, holding in her heavy hand a torch.

"Well," said she, "what may be your will? Little we have to fill your sack, if you are come on thieves' errand." And she laughed a low, ugly laugh.

"I am no thief, goodwife," he said, "but ask somewhere to lay my head to-night."

"Well, goodman, sit," said she, "and put down that ugly harp which matches thy attire so well and both doubtless match thy skill."

So by the fire he sat down, setting his harp by his side, and she sat too, spinning some coarse brown thread. But had he seen how there came a twinkle into her cold dead eyes, he might have risen again and left the hut. For as she looked she saw from under his poor grey cloak the gleam of gold. She arose, and wandering round the room, drew close to the great harp and could see some fringe of gold hanging from it. The man, too, in spite of patched clothes and worn shoes and unadorned sword, seemed to her more like a great king in need, so noble did he look.

With these things in her mind, she brought out some meal and began to make porridge and cake, looking closer at the man as she pretended to busy herself. As she passed him she managed to brush aside his cloak and saw a large gold circlet on his arm. Then her greed grew and dull hate filled her eyes; but the man heeded nothing, his thoughts were far away.

When she had laid the meal upon the table, she turned to him and said, "Meat and drink are here, fair lord, though somewhat poor.

Come ! " With a grin, she watched to see if at the name of " lord " he started ; he gave no sign of having heard, but wearily began to eat, while she stood by and poured the drink for him, as she said, " My husband will be home presently, worn out with hard work. His speech is ill then. I pray thee not to wait his coming. Our barley barn is close by, where a weary man might lie quite comfortably."

" Well, goodwife," said he, " lead the way ! worse lodging have I had than that. Go on before, for I have no wish to-night to meet an angry face and hold my hand from my good sword."

So out she passed without a word, though she noticed with greedy eyes how carefully he took the heavy harp. Soon they were at the barn's door. He turned round, and gazing down saw the wide sea shining white beneath the new-risen moon. His face grew bright, and with a smile he went into the dark place, and saw no more the sea, or sky, or the morrow's sun.

For when the husband came home that night the old woman, with all the skill she had, persuaded him to slay their guest while he was sleeping in the barn. Though a coward, he plucked up heart to strike the blow, and at

dawn passed to the barn. As he entered he heard the sound of harp-strings tinkling, then, as with all cowards, great fear of ghosts fell on his heart. Trembling greatly, he thrust apart the long stems of barley-straw and peering round, saw the lord asleep with his unsheathed sword laid over his knees, but his right hand was holding the harp-strings, from which came a mournful tinkling.

A strange sound fell on his ears like a young child murmuring, but he saw nothing to be afraid of, yet his hair stood upright on his head. Twice he was on the point of turning back, but in the end his wicked greed mastered him. He crept along with strong spear poised in his right hand. His heart beat fast as he passed over the floor, and he looked back over his shoulder in fear. Raising the spear, he thrust it through the noble breast, then turned and fled, hearing as he went a sound, half moan, half sigh; then all was still. In such fear he was that he stayed not until he had come into the hut and cried out for his wife in a shrill voice.

"Well," said she, "what need of this noise? Can ye not see me here? Well, then?"

"Wife," said he, "it is done, but I feel rather that I had killed a god instead of a man."

She laughed an evil laugh. "Well," she said, "no matter, if only he be dead."

"What if he only seemed to die," he said, "and when night draws nigh he comes again? For, wife, that harp of his is no earthly music, since, as the man lay asleep, it played a tune of its own self."

"An ugly, ill-made minstrel's tool," she answered, "thou blundering faint-heart! Some wind perhaps moaned through the barn and the man's hand struck the strings." Yet she shivered as she spoke, and neither dared go near the barn till the sun was high; then in they went together. They saw the old man lying in the straw as if asleep, though in his heart the spear lay deep, and round about the floor was red. The old woman bent down and stripped off the gold circlet from his arm, while her husband stood still, apart. Then she began to touch the harp, but try as she would she could not open it; so she bade her husband bring tools to split it. He brought them tremblingly, and the two worked till they had broken open the hollow, but shrank back in astonishment when they saw the little maiden, her clear grey eyes wide open, looking at them fearlessly.

The wife soon began to pull and touch the

golden raiment that the little one wore. Roughly she stripped it from her. "See," she said, turning to her husband, "gold! and gems! We must give the child food that she may live, for though it will be another mouth to feed, still she can be useful to us. The hardest work there is shall be hers." Then the man said, "Speak to her, for surely she can tell us something of her life and state."

But no word would the little maiden utter. No threat, no promise, would make her open her lips, till at last they thought she was tongue-tied. They brought her to the hut and clad her in rags of grey, while the slain lord they hid deep in the earth.

II

So with the two Aslaug abode, growing in beauty day by day, but always silent. The old woman called her "Crow." Very little food but plenty of blows was given her, yet she never wept, but would set her teeth hard and go about what work she had to do, until at last she grew to be more than a child.

The old hut and all in it that once had looked so dull and dirty grew almost bright, except the

old witch herself; she was no better, and always said any rag was good enough to clothe the Crow. Her hatred of the maiden grew more and more as Aslaug grew to womanhood, and often was she tempted to kill her, but fear kept her back.

In the spring of her seventeenth year Aslaug went one day with her goats upon the hillside. Everything around looked fair, and life seemed good in spite of her hard, cruel life. She turned into the wood, and wandered slim and fair between the trees. At last she passed into an open space where was a wide shallow lake on which the wild-fowl sported. Swiftly she passed over the firm grass between the rushes until she stood upon a bank of sand close to the water's edge. Gazing down, she saw her face mirrored in the water, and musically she laughed, heeding not her straying flock, and her voice, which none had heard since her loving guardian's death, rang out sweet and clear.

"Love cometh to all," she said, "but how can it come to me living among such wretched folk? Many a dream I dream that unknown folk will fetch me hence one day. Somewhere I know life must be gay."

While she spoke she cast aside her ragged garments and stepped into the cold clear lake

and played among the ripples. Leisurely she made her way again to the smooth bank, and having clad herself she called back her wandering flock, which came at her call, huddling round about her feet. With slow steps but light of heart, she went back through the thick wood and on to the hill looking over the sea. There she stood amazed, for in the bay, with oars resting, lay a long ship with flapping sail and a golden dragon carved on the bow.

With a strange hope, her eyes ran over the strand, and there lay beached a ship's boat, and on the shingle by the side stood three blue-clad sailors sent ashore most likely to get food for the ship.

She did not look long, but with beating heart and hurrying feet passed on to the hut. When she came near, she heard men's voices deep and rough, then the shrill cry of the old crone, saying, "I can do no work for you, I am old and weak; wait, my daughter Crow will soon be here, 'tis past noon."

"Well, we will wait a while," said a sailor.

At these words, Aslaug, with a strange smile and looking fresh from her revels in the lake, pushed back the crazy door and stood silently upon the threshold, bareheaded and barefoot.

The sailors stared open-mouthed as with bright eyes and flushed face she stood there in her rags; one gleaming lock of golden hair had strayed from her fair head and fell far below her waist. Round about her head she had set a garland of violets and wind-flowers, and about her waist a wreath of willow.

At last one of the sailors spoke: "It is very easy to see, goodwife, that this is no kin of thine."

The old woman could scarcely speak for rage. "Yea, indeed, she is of our kin; I was once as fair as she, but sixty-five winters change the skin. She is dumb, but she works the more; so, masters, start your baking, she will bring you wood and help you in your work."

Aslaug stood shaking all over, then went to help in the baking. When it was done, the men passed down to the ship with the bread; but when they had broken it they found it heavy, bitter, half baked and sodden, only fit to be thrown overboard. Their lord called for them and bade them say why they had worked so badly. The sailors stammered, and one at last spoke: "We went to a house and found very small store of anything; a yellow-faced old crone was there alone, but as we talked to her a damsel, clad in wretched garments yet as fair as a goddess,

THE FOSTERING OF ASLAUG

"He watched her pass from flower to flower in childish glee." *Page* 1[illegible]

came in, and she it was who stole our wits away."

"Well," said the lord, "this seems mere folly, yet you are all of one mind. Tell me, was the damsel as fair as my lady who is dead?"

One answer came from all alike: "My lord, this maiden was the fairest ever seen."

"Nothing will content me now," said the lord, "but to have sight of her and hear her fresh, sweet voice."

"Nay," said one, "the old crone called the maid tongue-tied. She had not spoken since her birth, she said."

Thoughtfully the lord spoke: "There seems some wonder here. Go back to the cottage in the early morning and say I would see her before the day is gone. She is to come here, and tell her she will be as well treated as if in her father's home and I her brother."

So the next morn Aslaug had the message to come unto the King. She said nothing, but made as though she fully understood and gave assent. The old woman was there when the message was given and glared with hatred, but the sailors took no note of her.

The sun grew hot, then waned, and day was nearly done when the maiden slowly took the

steep path down to the sea. Her hair shone golden in the light of the setting sun. As she went she gazed at her poor raiment, and flushing red she muttered, " Who can tell but I may love this great lord well ? What then should I do if he cast shamed eyes on these old rags ? "

While her cheek still burned like fire she put her hand to her golden hair and let it fall in many ripples over her, and thus she went upon her way.

Now when the crew beheld her coming over the sand they set up a mighty shout ; only the lord stood silently gazing overboard until she reached the bridge. When her foot first pressed the plank he went towards her with outstretched hands and bade her welcome.

" Full well, fair maid, may we rejoice this eve," he said, " that thou hast come to us." Through the ship he led her, speaking to her tenderly of his home and the lonely hours he had spent. He remembered nothing of what his men had said that she was dumb. Not once did she turn her eyes away from his as she stood beside him on the deck. The hours to him were sweet, and soon he told her of his love.

With trembling lips swiftly she spoke : " Happy am I indeed, if only thou art happy too."

With a joyous cry, he caught her to him. "Ah," he cried, "what joy thy words are to me!"

She drew back and said, "Alas! my happiness darkens, for I needs must pass back to the land to be more sad now that I have known this joy. Wilt thou be sorry too?" His hand rested lightly on her golden hair as she went on speaking. "It is wise to wait a while. Behold, the world is wide, yet have we found each other here. But a King thou art, and I am nothing, how know I that thou wouldst not weary soon of me? Thou art mighty, and art far wiser than I."

"What wouldst thou have me do?" he cried.

"Thou goest to some deed of fame," she said; "go on thy way, then, and if by chance thou comest once more to this lonely home, here shalt thou find me who will only live for that happy day when thy oars shall rest once again in the bay."

"Last Yule," he said, "I made a vow to win fame in some far land. I will go; but come nearer that I may tell thee my name, that if so be Death take me from thee, thou mayst then think of me and say, 'Ragnar the Dane loved me to the end.' Farewell!"

"Farewell!" she cried, "but think well what

I am, a peasant maid of a poor wretched crone, working from dawn till dusk."

He stepped back from her, smiling, and drew forth from a great chest a rich silken cloak. She reached her hand towards it, then smilingly drew back. "Our rough hills and smoky hut," she said, "befit not anything so glorious. If I took it, the first to wear it would be the old crone."

The moon shone full upon her face as she passed slowly over the bridge and went quickly away over the sands alone. The King watched her till she stepped up the dark cliff and vanished from him into the night. Then he called for oar and sail, and before the morning dawned the ship had left the bay.

III

Back to her home the maiden went and worked as before. She spoke no word, but went about with grave, sweet face, happy in the memory of her one glad day.

Spring passed, summer came and went, and all the woods were aflame with autumn tints, but no ship came. The winter passed, and once again 'twas spring, as Aslaug loitered with hanging head through the budding woods and

over the flowery meadows. It was on a May morning when adown the glen came the sound of a mighty horn.

With his axe on his shoulder, the goodman ran swiftly down the slope and came back in breathless haste. "Ah! here they are," he cried, "come back for something worse. The dumb maid has brought us this ill luck."

"Well," said the goodwife, "who are they?"

"They who baked their bread within this house last spring," said he. "Often have I wondered why the maid went to the bay that evening."

"Nay, perchance comes some good luck," the old crone said.

"Hold thy peace!" cried the man; "what good fortune can ever come to us?—rather a punishment for that murder of fifteen years ago. But we shall soon know the worst, for I hear their voices."

Silently and pale Aslaug passed in and drew to the fire, and soon the clink of sword was heard outside. The door was pushed open and one cried, "Hail to this house, if here still dwells the maiden glorious and fair that we have come for, from across the seas."

Aslaug knelt by the fire, her hand screening

her face. Then up stood the goodman, trembling with fear. "Well," he said, "we have fed this dumb maid all these years for kindness' sake."

"No need," answered the sailor, "to make long words, we pay little heed to thy lies; if she will, she can doom thee to death." Then turning to Aslaug, "All hail, our Lady and our Queen!" he cried.

The maiden had risen and for the first time in that dusky place spoke. "I doubt not, O seafarers," said she, "that ye have some message from that goodly lord who spoke so pleasantly to a poor maid last year."

The man answered, "Even thus our lord spoke: 'If she live, and still can give her love to me, let her make no delay, but come.'"

"Come, then, for of all men I love him best," said she. "But have ye there anything that these two might have? Their needs are many and will be harder when I am gone."

The sailor answered, "We have many rich things here that our master bade us bring, and queenly raiment for thee; but all we have is at thy word to keep or give away."

"Then, friends," she said, "since he gives me of his bounty, I will make use of it. Give it all to these two, for I will go to the King in

my peasant dress, and he shall see again the poor girl whom he loved." Then turning to the goodman and his wife, "Farewell," she said, "I have little to thank you for since in your house I came to dwell." As she spoke her glorious face shone for the last time on that abode, and the two stood amazed at the rings and gems, and for a long while they dared not touch them.

Aslaug went down the hill with the sailors to the sea. A great shout arose from the ship as through the foam waded one to meet her. With beating heart she stood, while to the right and left the men drew back. She heard a well-known voice, and round her mighty arms were cast; eyes met eyes, she read in his fresh pride, fresh hope, fresh love, and saw the long sweet days of the future with themselves hand in hand as now they went along the strand.

Next day she told him of a strange dream and vision she had had that night.

"In my sleep," said Aslaug, "I saw a fair golden palace with an open door. I entered, and there beneath a golden canopy sat a King and Queen. He was the goodliest of men, and she the sweetest of all womankind. The King turned and spoke: 'What noise is this I hear,

my Queen ?' She moved her head, and in a voice like music said, 'This is the noise of the fame of Ragnar the Dane.'

"'And whose is the shadow that I see down the hall ?' asked the King, pointing to where I stood.

"Then said the Queen, 'Our daughter, surely, for unto Ragnar she is wed.' With that the dream passed."

And ancient stories tell that in course of time King Ragnar found the dream was true and his beautiful bride was of the highest in the land.

VIII

ATALANTA'S RACE

I

THROUGH the thick Arcadian woods one fresh spring day a hunter passed, following his hounds, but since he had killed nothing and now it was noontide, within a vale he called the dogs away.

As with slow steps he went on his way, the trees grew thinner, then the wood was passed. Turning to see what place he had reached, he beheld the town of King Schœneus bright in the sunshine of an April day. Towards it he wended his way, and on each side folk were busy on the land among the corn or vines. All around seemed merry; the birds were singing, the sun was shining, the spring flowers bloomed by the roadside, lambs were frisking by their mothers. Through this fair countryside he walked till he reached the gates of the town and found them open. He entered, unquestioned of his race or

name; the streets at first seemed empty of people, but pressing on and going more quickly he saw men hurrying along in crowds.

Following, he still pressed on, until he came to an open space where many wreaths of fame for deeds of strength and speed had often been lost and won. The whole wide space was bare, but the high seats round it were filled with eager people.

There with the others he sat down and looked around. He beheld a richly broidered canopy under which sat the King in bright array with his counsellors round him; and underneath he saw a golden image of the sun, and a silver image of the goddess Diana, the Fleet-foot One. A brazen altar stood beneath their feet, and on it a thin flame flickered in the wind. Standing near was a tall man holding a sword entwined with yellow flowers, and by him stood a herald ready even then to sound his horn. These stood a little space away from the altar, near the starting-place.

Two runners waited for the sign to start, foot set to foot,—a young man slim and fair, crisp-haired, well-knit, wearing on his head a golden circlet and carrying in his hand an olive branch; and a fair maiden clad like the goddess

Diana. Her face was calm, her wide grey eyes were set upon the goal, she stood there unmoved as though no one was near ; but her foe trembled as a man afraid, and his anxious face burned with fierce desire.

Now, just as the sun was setting, through the hush broke the sound of the trumpet, dust sprang from light feet and swiftly they were running side by side. Breathless the crowd watched until the turning-post was reached and round it the runners passed, still abreast. When they were half-way back to the starting-point a cry of joy broke forth as the man passed the white-foot maiden and was drawing near the end of all his fear. He scarcely touched the ground with his straining feet. But midst the loud victorious shouts he heard her footsteps drawing nearer and the sound of fluttering raiment. Fearing, he turned round his eager flushed face, and even at that moment the maiden bounded past him, fleet as the wind. He scarcely saw her till she laid her fingers on the goal.

There she stood, breathing like a little child asleep ; no victorious flush was on her cheeks, no triumph lit up her clear deep grey eyes, though some divine thought softened all her face.

Once more the trumpet rang through the air.

Her late foe stopped short amidst his course and gazed upon her piteously for one moment, then with a groan he moved away. He was changed, like one who knows his time must be but short and bitter, and without a word he knelt before the bearer of the sword.

Then high rose the gleaming deadly blade, bared of its flowers, and silence reigned throughout that crowded place. The maid went by the poor wretch at a gentle pace; he raised his sad white face to hers for one last look, then on his soul there fell eternal night.

So the pageant ended, and the crowd broke up into little groups. Night was setting in, the shrill bats were already on the wing. With the last of the crowd the hunter went, wondering at the strange sight he had witnessed. Seeing an old man near, he asked him to tell him what it meant, why the vanquished man had been slain, and if the maiden were an earthly queen.

"Stranger," said the old man, "I pray she soon may die whose lovely youth has slain so many. She is the daughter of King Schœneus. When she was born the King was angry, for he wished to have a son; therefore he bade a servant leave her in the wood that she might be killed of wild beasts; but she was saved, some people

say by a rough bear that brought her up with her cubs. In course of time a woodman killed the bear and brought the young child home to his cottage. There she grew up to be a woman, swift of foot and skilled in arms. Led by fate, one day she came to this city, and, how I cannot tell, but the King recognised and claimed her for his child.

"Since that day she has lived with him, sending too many noble souls to death. What! thine eyes glisten! Thinkest thou to bow down her shining head? Listen, my son, and love some other maid. Yet, if thou hast no fear of death, thou still mayst woo her like him thou sawest lie dead this day, for the maid hath vowed that she will only wed such a man as can outrun her swift feet in the course. But whoso fails in the attempt, his days are done. He who was slain to-day comes the nearest to winning of any, although I think that she did but play with him. Be wise! Be sure that there lives many a maid gentler than she and of little less beauty, who will love thee."

Thus the old man spake to the hunter, then left him for his own home. But the hunter turned round and in the moonlight found his way to the thick wood where between the trees

he passed the night half in sleep, half in waking, and at dawn arose and waged hot war against the forest beasts. But hunting had lost its pleasure, his restlessness increased.

He came into the cities, and there stood in the lists with valiant men, and won praise and fame by great deeds ; but none of these things seemed to satisfy him.

Thus it happened that when a month had passed, once again he went through the gate of King Schœneus' old city, and folk said to him, "And art thou come to see that which makes our city's name accursed among all mothers for its cruelty ? To-morrow, a new luckless one is pledged to run against the white-foot maid."

On the morrow he saw again the piteous sight, the conquering maid, the conquered slain ! How long the night that followed ! How long before the dawn ! And then how long before the sun bade the toilers of the earth go forth !

Very early he stood in the market-place waiting for the appearance of King Schœneus. At last the time came when he must claim his love and jeering voices must salute his name. As he pressed through the throng of people, his face troubled and anxious, folk whispered to each other as they saw his god-like figure, and

one old woman as he went by plucked him by the sleeve and prayed him stop, for she said, "Fair son, thou goest to sacrifice thyself; thou canst not know the vow Atalanta, the King's daughter, hath made with the goddess. Come back, give not thyself to death."

He turned away and passed swiftly on, till in the cleared space before the throne he stood alone. Then said the King, "Stranger, what dost thou here? Have any of my people done ill to thee, or art thou one of those who strive to win my daughter, staking their lives to win the maid?"

"O King," he said, "thou sayest truly, nor will I quit the strife till I have won. Know thou that I am called Milanion, a well-loved son of a great King, so fear not that my victory will bring shame on thy old name."

"Nay, Prince," said Schœneus, "thou art welcome to this land if thou wert here only to try thy strength against someone mighty of his hand, but now why wilt thou come to me to die, and at my door lay down thy head, swelling the band of the unlucky dead? O son, be wise and hearken unto me; the world is wide, thou wilt find another fair maiden who will be dear to thee, but if thou losest life, then all is lost."

"Nay, King," said Milanion, "thy words are vain. I have well counted the cost; but say on what day wilt thou that I try to win delight or death? Glad should I be if it were to-day."

"Nay," said King Schœneus, "that it shall not be; rather let a month go by that I may try to win thee from thy purpose. Until then, O Prince, be thou my guest."

"Nay," said he, "I cannot rest. Till the day come I will wander to the temples of the gods and make what promises I can. I must also say farewell to friend and foe." So he took his way to the restless sea, for there he thought his rest and help might be.

II

On the shore of Argolis, in the south of Greece, there stood a temple to Venus, the goddess of Love. The shrine was reached through a grove of myrtle trees; brass doors guarded the entrance to the holy place. Entering them you could hear the washing of the seas that twice a day rose high above the base of the statue and reached to the marble feet of the goddess. Around the white image were many precious things, rich gifts from those who had come to worship at her shrine.

ATALANTA'S RACE.

"Thither now came Milanion, and brought with him gifts— *Page* 161.

Thither now came Milanion, and brought with him gifts fairer than all those that were there before—silk cloths, and mystic bowls, and mirrors for the goddess. These he offered to the priests of her temple, while he prayed, "O Goddess, have pity on the lowly head that bows before thee; help me, and grant me victory over the fair maiden. Plead for me that we may live and love together; give her joy, and take away my pain. Then shalt thou gain for ever two thankful servants. Here will I wait for some happy sign from thee ere I go forth to meet my death or victory."

Then he drew back a space from the altar, and leaned against a pillar, but kept his eyes fixed on the marble queen. There he stood when the sun went down and the wan moonlight streamed through the pillars and lit up the white queen's changeless smile.

The temple maidens sang their midnight hymn, the waves washed over the marble base and steps, the rising sea tossed little jets of spray across him, but he noted nothing.

Long before the rising of the sun, a faint light lit up the southern sky, not sun or moon, for all the world was grey. It seemed more like a bright cloud that drew nearer and nearer and

grew greater till Milanion saw nothing for dazzling light around him.

He staggered with outstretched arms; delicious odours breathed around him; he bowed his head in happiness and sank upon the ground. The sign had come!

At last his eyes were cleared and he could see through happy tears the goddess face to face. Through the stillness he could hear her voice: "Milanion, wherefore dost thou fear? I am not hard to those who love me well. Listen, and thou mayst live to save the cruel maiden from a loveless grave. See, by my feet lie three golden apples, take these with thee to the race, and when first she heads thee from the starting-place, cast down one for her eyes to see, and when she turns aside to pick it up, race on; and if again she heads thee, spare not the other two to cast aside. Farewell, and when thou hast won the maiden, forget not me the Helper of Unhappy Men."

Milanion raised his head, but saw nothing save the white image glimmering cold and grey in the twilight and three golden apples on the steps. He caught them up in trembling haste and left the fair place to walk once more the haunts of men.

The lingering month has at last gone by. Again all the folk are seated round the running-place, but now Milanion stands on the smooth course ready for the race.

But what change is this that holds the maid? Does she see in his glittering eye some happy hope of victory? The others had seemed to say, "We come to die," but he—what a look of mastery he casts on her! Why are his lips so red, his face so flushed with happiness?

Above their heads the trumpet blast rings out and forth they spring. Her white feet fly over the ground; slackening once, she turns her head, then cries aloud and faster runs than ever before. All men deem Milanion dead!

But with no sound he raises his hand, and what seems a ray of light shoots past the maid and rolls along the sandy ground. Atalanta sees the golden fruit, and in her heart grows a strong desire to have the toy: some god, she thinks, has given that gift to her. She stoops and picks it up. When she looks again, the great-limbed man is well ahead. Mindful of her glory, she springs on and follows in hot pursuit. The turning-post is reached, but as Milanion sets his mighty hand on it, white fingers touch it at the same time; next the maiden is ahead. Then he casts the

second fruit in front of the maid; she runs for a while, then wavers and stops. She turns, and the second bright globe is in her hand. Far ahead she sees her rival now, while she clasps her double prize. She speeds on with little doubt that she will win the day, though but a short space is left between them and the winning-place. Quickly she gains on him; they are abreast, when from his hand he casts the third apple. She wavers not, but runs quickly aside after the prize. She has it, then turns, as she thinks, to victory. And yet—and yet—why does her breath begin to fail her and her feet to drag heavily? Why do her eyes grow dim that she cannot see the goal? Why is she trembling in every limb?

She spreads out her arms to find some support, for she is falling. At the post stands Milanion, the victor in the race. He sees her faltering, and rushes forward to catch her in his arms; nor does she shudder now to feel his kiss, so wrapped is she in new-found bliss. She weeps glad tears for all her glory passed, and is happy that this foe has won the prize.

Shatter the trumpet, hew down the posts, break the sword upon the altar; but scatter incense, in memory of those who here have died.

IX

THE PROUD KING

I

Long, long ago, in a far country which I cannot name, there dwelt a King in peace and ease and fame, and much richer than any emperor of to-day. The very thought of what this man might say kept many a lord awake from dusk to dawn, so much was he feared. He was surpassingly proud, no man might speak to him without leave; his conquests were many and his titles too. He was wedded to a noble lady and had ruled for many years over his kingdom.

Now it chanced on a May morning the King lay wakeful in his bed, counting up his titles one by one and thinking with pride of the many things he had done. No one dared say him nay in anything, none dared accuse him of wrong; the land far and wide was under his sway. His vain heart swelled with pride, until at last he raised himself and cried—

"What need have I for temple or for priest? Am I not God, at least while I live? And I may never die, my life may be unending on this earth, who knows? My sire indeed was called a mighty king, but his kingdom was little compared with mine, and moreover his grandsire was but a small prince when compared with him, whose rule was over some little town where now stands the kennel of my dogs. Then, may I not rise higher yet, and not die like other poor wretches, since we have ever gone up the ladder of fame step after step without one fall? And there are tales of people who have won unending life without care or pain. Perchance that prize is mine."

With these thoughts he fell asleep, and when he woke again the sun was high. He sprang from his gold bed remembering nothing of his former thoughts, but said, "To-day we will hunt through the green woods, it may be with even greater success than the chase of yesterday."

Clothed for the hunt, he rode forth in a merry mood with his men and his strong deep-chested hounds over the dewy grass. There, the King on a horse worth a kingdom followed up a mighty stag and so outdistanced his huntsmen that he

came alone, at the hottest part of the day, to a shaded river-side.

Dismounting, and seeing the red-finned fishes sporting in the clear stream, he thought it worth his royal crown to hide in the sparkling water from the burning heat of the day. So, tying his horse to a neighbouring tree, he took off his rich array and sported leisurely in the stream.

When he felt well refreshed with this delight he walked on to the bank to don once more his royal robes and ride homeward to his palace. But, amazed and angry, he looked far and wide; no trace of his horse or his rich attire could be seen. What vengeance he threatened against the thief! He shouted for help, but no answer came, —the lazy fishes still swam by inches against the stream; the birds, startled at first by his shouts, now fluttered to and fro, not much afraid of such a harmless man.

Weary of crying in that lonely place, he ceased, and thinking what to do walked up the stream. Not far away he knew there was a house where his forest-ranger lived, a lord true and loyal who had received many kindnesses at his hands and who would be right glad to aid him.

He hastened on, and as he went the hot sun

sorely burned his unprotected skin, while he thought, "When he has lent to me fine raiment and I sit in his coolest room drinking refreshing wine I shall forget this hot, troublous day."

Now, while the King thus went on his way, his people were searching for him far and wide. Soon there met them one clothed in the King's own royal robes and riding his horse. As they thought it was indeed their master they hailed him King, and all rode out of the forest to the palace. There in royal disguise he sat at meat, served, as was the custom, beneath the canopy, while the hounds fawned round about his feet and the Queen greeted him as her lord.

We will leave him there, and follow the other as he walked up stream.

He came to the ranger's house and blew the horn. The wary porter peered through the gate to see if he knew the blower before he unfastened the door. When he saw a man standing there without even a cloak, he cried, "What dost thou here? We don't buy skins to-day; go home and get thyself a covering."

As he ceased, the King cried out, "Open, O foolish man! I am thy lord and King, Jovinian. Go now and tell thy master I am here, desiring food and clothes; then hereafter thou needest

have no fear because thou didst not know me at first sight."

"Yea, yea," laughed the porter, "I am but dreaming in the night, and I bid thee dream too, friend. Come through! never mind the gate, that will vanish away!" With that he disappeared, and the King was left standing alone. He hurled himself against the mighty gate and beat upon it madly with a stone. At last the gate flew back, and there stood the porter, staff in hand.

"Fool," he cried, "thou makest this noise wishing to be brought before my lord's high seat; thou wilt be gladder to leave it, I warrant. Come, thou shalt tell this tale unto my lord."

With that, he handled his staff as if he would strike the King and said, "Get on before, and if ever I am blamed for this matter thou shalt not escape; thy back is broad enough to bear the punishment."

Half blind with rage, the King passed on before him, the porter following, till they came to the ranger's house, fair and new and white, built for him by the King only a year ago. Often the King had come there, for he much loved this lord who once had been a landless squire, the servant of the Queen.

Clad in rich raiment, he now sat in his hall before the wine, watching the evening sun gleaming between the branches of the trees in his garden. From outside came the sound of mocking merriment, and a squire came hurrying in with laughter still in his eyes and said, "My lord, an unclothed man is outside, who saith that thou wilt know him for the King. The porter hath just brought him up from the gate. He is nothing like the King, except he weareth his beard the same way. Wilt thou that he be brought? Perchance there is some treason beneath his madness."

"Yea," said the ranger, "that may be wise; but haste, for now is my time of rest and I would not be wearied with such folk as these."

The squire went and brought in the porter and the King, who thought now that this would end his troubles and was quite ready to forgive the porter his sin.

"Thou wonderest how I have come to thee without raiment; well, thou shalt know, but first, I pray thee, Hugh, reach me that cloak that lieth there, for it seems to me that, though thy folk are loyal and true, they cannot recognise a king without his crown and silken robe and sword. So, such are the common folk, but thou

and I know better the signs of majesty. Thou risest not! Thou lookest strange on me! Ah, what is this? Who reigneth in my stead? How long hast thou been plotting secretly? Then slay me now, for if I be not dead, armies will rise up when I nod my head. Slay me! or cast away thy treachery and dwell again in my favour from this day."

"Why should I upset thee, and tell thee that thou never wast a King?" said the ranger. "Poor fellow, thou dost not understand. I pray God to help thee and send thee quieter days before thou diest. Thou shalt have help from us. Good fellows, this poor creature is mad, take him and give him a coat and meat and drink; let him stay beneath some roof of ours on this night, and some day God may heal his mind."

Then the King spread out his arms and cried, "May woe befall thy food, thy house, and thee, thou traitor! Get ye from the hall lest, smitten by God's hand, this roof should fall on thee. Yea, even yet ye shall see red flame stream from out these carven windows, for I will burn this vile place that harbours such a wretch, such a Judas as thou!"

Thus raving, he shook off those who held him and rushed from the hall, nearly mad

indeed, and reached the gate. He ran on he knew not where at headlong speed, till worn out he fell beneath a tree on the grassy roadside.

As for the ranger, he sat on in peace, thinking of his life and the increase of his goods, a happy man, who felt most lovingly towards his master. "I must tell the King of this luckless madman when next I see him," he thought.

Meanwhile, Jovinian lay by the roadside, panting, confused, not knowing whether he dreamed or not, until at last when the day was ended, through the dark night he saw a bright light, and down the road there streamed the glare of torches held by men who ran before the litter of a mighty man.

Mounted soldiers were with them, and together they filled the road. On their harness the King could see the badge of one of his own councillors, a man who had grown old in his service. He started up and in a shrill voice cried—

"Well met, Duke Peter! thou wert ever wise, thou canst not let a day go by before thou art good friends with mine enemies. Go on thy journey, thou time-server, thou prince of schemers!"

A soldier stepped quickly forward and smote him with his sheathed sword. "Speak louder, that my lord may hear and punish thee," he

cried. "Come forth, for I must show thee to my master; he may think thee more than mad to speak thus of him."

The litter stopped in the middle of the road, and round about in a ring gathered the torches, and by their flickering light the King could see gold and gems and the well-known face of him who had but yesterday offered him humble words amidst the gathering of the lords. But now he said, "Man, thou wert speaking evil of me if these folk heard aright; what wilt thou then? Thinkest thou that I have done thee some wrong, or have any of my men harmed thee? In any case, come and tell thy tale again to me when I sit on my judgment-seat and I will give no careless ear to it."

"The night is dark," answered the King, "and in the summer wind the torches flicker. Canst thou see my face? Bid them draw nearer with the torches, and call to mind who gave thee all thy riches and thy place. Alas! canst thou not see that I am the King?"

As their eyes met, Jovinian saw with dread that the other knew him not before even he spoke.

"Friend, a strange story thou art pleased to tell; it is fortunate for thee that it is to me thou hast told it. I deem thee mad and let thee go

thy way; not so the King if he hear thee,—no pity will he show. Poor fool! take this, and when day dawns buy food and raiment; but keep away from the town, for fear thy madness break out again and thou art carried before the judge for punishment. Press on, sirs! The time is late."

The King stood speechless, holding in his hand a coin new-stamped with his own image, with sceptre, crown, and royal robe. His jewelled feet rested upon a globe as though all men were nothing to him. Night came on; the lonely, wretched King muttered, "I wish the day would never come back if I am to lack all I once had. Ah God! how long is it since I was King and had no wish left to be granted?"

Down the lonely road he wandered, following the vanished torches, he scarcely knew why, till at last he reached a grassy bank, where worn out with misery he slept the dreamless sleep of weariness.

II

He awoke at dawn, not knowing at first how he came to be there or why he felt so wretched. At last remembering, he arose, and the rising sun and fresh morning air put some hope in him that the end of his miseries might soon come.

Looking round, he saw that he had come near his own city gates. Hiding now and then from the country folk who were carrying their goods to market, he came at last within a stone's-throw of the gate. There he could hide himself no longer, but came out among the crowd. Some mocked, some asked him his name and country, but one drew him up into his waggon and gave him milk from a beechen cup, and asked him what his trouble was.

"Friend," said the King, "last night I met with foes who robbed me and with blows stripped off my clothing and left me. Thomas the Pilgrim I am called to-day. I am a merchant from yonder town and rich enough to pay thee for thy deed if thou wilt set me down at the King's door. For there I know a squire who will give me food, drink, and clothing. What is thy name? in what place dost thou live? Tell me, that I may some day reward thee with great gifts."

"Fair sir," said the countryman, "I am poor enough, though certainly not lacking food. My name is Christopher a-Green; I sow a little orchard set with bush and tree, and that keeps me. I have lived there from a little boy and am now fifty, and have known both grief and joy. The house, my grandsire built there, is

old now, and truly it would be a bounteous gift if thou shouldst give me just enough gold to build it anew, nor shouldst thou lack my prayers for such a gift."

"Nay, friend," said the King; "that is but a little thing to me, who am as rich as the King."

As they talked, the gate was opened wide, and they went together through the street, Christopher walking by the side of the waggon in which Jovinian lay. In a short time they were at the palace. Through the open gate of the first court the King ran, no man stopping him; but as he reached the second, a man of the King's household cried out, "Whither dost thou go? Surely thou art more than mad, or else bewitched."

"But," said the King, "I know thee, good fellow, and can it be thou knowest not thy King? Thou shalt have a good reward of me if thou wilt clothe me in fair robes again, for I am going now to my council."

"Out, madman!" said the fellow; "what sayest thou? King indeed! for lighter words than those I have seen men die. Come, the sergeants must see to this thing."

So Jovinian was brought to the guard-room, where his own soldiers mocked him bitterly, heeding not his desperate words, until at last

the thought came to him that he should never be free from this misery, but thus should die in spite of all his struggles. It seemed terrible that everything since yesterday was so utterly changed, that these who were the King's soldiers, ready to lie down in the common road before him, now stood and mocked him, not knowing the face at whose command each man there had his place.

"Ah, God!" he said, "is this another earth from that on which I stood two days ago? or am I sleeping or dreaming?"

In the midst of his wretched thoughts two sergeants came who said, "The King would see this man who thus so rashly brings shame upon him by taking upon himself his high style and spotless name. Come, fool, thou must go with us."

At the sight of him as he went between the two soldiers across the courts, all men turned round, until they came to the threshold of the great hall within the palace. Jovinian's heart beat fast as he thought, "Lo, here shall end the strife; for either I shall sit on mine own seat known unto all, soldier and lord and wife, or else this is the end of all, and no man henceforth shall remember me, only a name in vain records shall I be."

He raised his head and there, set on his royal

throne, he beheld one clad in gold, gold-crowned, with the ivory sceptre in his hand, and underneath him sat the Queen alone, while round about were lords standing in utmost reverence.

Jovinian shook in every limb, enraged and amazed, yet it seemed to him that this man was in no way like him in the face, but a marvellous glory gleamed round his head as though an angel sat in that high place. As their eyes met, with a stern, calm brow the shining one cried out, "And who art thou, robber of my majesty?"

"Was I not King," replied he, "only yesterday? and though to-day folk give my place to thee, I am Jovinian. Yea, though all deny me, though thou shouldst slay me on these stones, though no friend be left to moan for me, I am Jovinian still and King alone."

"O thou foolish man," said the other, "King was I yesterday and for long before, and my name is Jovinian. Thou, fool, art first to speak against my right, and surely thou deservedst well to die, yet before I bid men lead thee to death, hearken to these my lords who stand near, and to what this faithful Queen beside me saith. Behold my face, my lords, look well on it; and thou, O fair Queen, say now whose face is this!"

Then cried they all, "Hail, Lord Jovinian long mayst thou live!" and the Queen knelt to kiss his gold-shod feet, and the colour ran through her sweet face as she said, "Thou art my lord Jovinian, true and dear."

Then said the shining one, "O thou wretch, hear now and see! What should hinder me from slaying thee now? And yet such mercy is in me that if thou wilt now humbly kneel and confess thou art no king, thou shalt live in mine house and take thy part among my servants."

The unhappy King laughed bitterly, and a red flush dyed his face. "Thou liest!" he cried. "I am Jovinian, born of great kings, nor am I such a man as still to live on when all delight is gone."

The other made no answer for a while, but sat and gazed at him steadfastly until a smile came across his face, a smile of pity mingled with scorn. "Thou shalt not die," he said, "but live on, a lowly man, forgetting thou wast once Jovinian."

Round the hall the wretched King wildly gazed, turning to many a well-known face; but all stood unmoved each in his accustomed place, —the chamberlain, the marshal with his mace, the lords, the grey-headed captain of the guard,

the ambassadors from half-conquered lands, and beyond them the merchants. There was no doubt in any man that the gold throne still held Jovinian.

Even the mighty hound that crouched before the throne, his companion in many a hunt, turned and flew at him, ready to tear him limb from limb as the sergeants led him away.

"Ah," he muttered, "thou, too, hound, take thou thy wages; worship the risen sun as these men do."

They thrust him outside the door and dragged him through the gate, through which he had so often ridden in royal state. Then down the streets they led him, where in days gone by he had seen so many times the line of flashing steel and gold welcoming him home from some successful war and had heard the bells clanging out the joyful news of his return. Now he murmured, "God and the world against one lonely head!"

Outside the city the sergeants loosed their hold and said, "Thus saith our lord the King, 'Dwell now in peace, but come not again into the town with thy lies lest a worse punishment befall thee.' For ourselves, we bid thee ever pray for him who has been good to thee this day."

They turned away, and Jovinian wandered on and on, he knew not where, when looking round he saw a little brook that ran in pools and shallows and on the farther side of it a wood, near which stood a little clay-built hut. Gazing at it, he suddenly remembered that a priest dwelt there, a wise old hermit, to whom he had often gone for advice when he was a young and careless ruler, though but scanty attention he had paid to the good man's counsels.

He passed the brook and went speedily toward the little house and knocked at the door, trembling with fear. "Will he remember me?" he thought.

The holy man came to the door and said, "Good friend, what tidings hast thou brought?"

"Father," he said, "knowest thou Jovinian? Knowest thou me not, made wretched, poor, and wan? Alas, O father! am I not the King, the rightful lord of thee and everything?"

"Nay, thou art mad to tell me such a tale! If thou seekest for counsel, such mocking words as thou hast uttered will not help thee here"; and the hermit went back into his hut.

The unhappy King fell upon his knees, weeping, and cried aloud, "Lord God, what bitter things are these? What hast Thou done that

I should be neglected by all men? O God, give me back myself again! even if I must die immediately. Indeed I know that day by day I have grown worse, who was but of little worth when I was born, and yet it pleased Thee once to make me King. Why hast Thou made me now this wretched thing? Why am I despised so of everyone? Wilt Thou not let me live my life again, forgetting all the deeds that I have done, forgetting my old name and vain honours? Yet if Thou wilt not, help me in this strife that I may pass my little span of life in happiness. What shall I say? Thou madest me weak of will, Thou wrappedst me round with ease and comfort, and yet, I know Thou lovest me still. Look down! I am tired of my folly, and now am yielding clay ready to be impressed with Thy likeness."

Scarcely had he done speaking when once again the old hermit came out and said, "Alas! my master and my son, is this a dream my weary eyes behold? Why art thou in this trouble?"

A strange surprised look of joy came over the King's face as he answered, "For some great sin the Lord has brought me to this shame. I am unknown of servants, wife, and friends; unknown of all the lords that stand within my

palace; nor didst thou know me when just now I stood before thy door. Now, since thou knowest me, surely God is good and will not slay me, but will pardon. Again will I brave these blind men if thou wilt give me thy poorest cloak and some rough food which I sorely need."

Weeping, the old hermit replied, "Dear lord, what trouble thou hast had! Enter, O King, take this rough gown and cord and what scant food my hut can afford and tell me everything. Then may God pardon thee and speed thee on thy way."

So when he was clad in coarse serge raiment he told the priest of all his pride and vainglory. The wise man gave him good advice and made ready his own ass for the King to ride.

It was growing toward the end of the day when the King, trembling with joy, rode onward to his city, meeting few folk upon that eventide.

When he came to the city gate he noticed two old warders standing there, and as he passed he heard one whisper to the other, "The King! who gave orders that if this evening he should pass this gate in disguise, no notice should be taken of him."

With joy at these words, Jovinian smiled and passed onward quickly down the street, and

was rejoiced to see the folk he met gaze hard at him as though they would like to greet his well-known face but dare not disobey his wish.

Coming to the palace, he alighted and entered once again his royal home. People bowed before him, and a squire softly said to him, "The Queen awaits thee, O my lord the King, within the little hall, where thou badest her meet thee on this night."

"Lead on, then!" said the King, and in his heart he said, "All goeth right and I am King again." But with a start he thought of him who played the kingly part that morn, but said, "If God will, this man will know my face like all the rest."

In the little hall he found the Queen asleep; her silk-threaded needle lay loose in her hand, and her embroidery had fallen upon the ground. By her stood that image of the King in rich apparel, crown, and signet-ring.

When the King stepped forward with angry eye and would have spoken, there came a sudden light, and a change passed over that other standing there. He was clad in a robe of shining white, embroidered with flowers of unnamed colours, and girt with a marvellous girdle. From his shoulders arose two wings of strange and lovely

hues that swayed to and fro with his body. Now he spoke—

"O King, be not afraid or think my coming here strange, for often before this have I been close to thee. And now thou knowest in how short a time God can make all folk forget thee utterly, though He alter not thy face; that thou canst be a nameless wretch to-day, who yesterday woke up a King. Thou oughtest to thank God for this, that on this side of thy grave thou hast learned how great a God He is; for many a man knows it not until too late! Now must I go, nor wilt thou see me again until the day when thou standest on the eternal shore where all is wonderful and changed. Therefore farewell! I have taken thy place for a day, now thou shalt meet thy nobles at council and at feast as thou hast ever done, nor wilt thou be any more strange to them."

Scarcely had he done speaking before his wings shone for a moment in the doorway and he had vanished. Everything to Jovinian seemed like some distinct and well-remembered dream from which one wakes in the night thinking the moonshine to be morning light.

He stood silent, pondering over all these wondrous things until the Queen arose from

sleep and with a smile said, "O fair lord, your great men even now fill the banquet-hall to greet thee. Wilt thou not therefore meet them as a King, undisguised?"

So as soon as he was clad in rich array he sat on his kingly throne as though no other had sat there that day; nor did a soul say a word about the poor madman who on that morn had stood before the throne weak, helpless, and forlorn.

But day by day the now gentle Jovinian thought of it as the years went by and his life drew to a close. One May morning as the grey-headed King lay wakeful in his bed, he thought, "It is thirty years ago to-day that I was taught my lesson of humility, and no man is now alive who thinks that he, who bade them thrust out the madman, was other than the King they used to see. Long years have passed now since the hermit died, so I must tell this tale before I lie by his side, or it will be unrecorded like a forgotten dream in morning light. This day will I tell everything to some scribe that it may be written down as a warning to those who come after."

So it was done, yet little heed the new King who came after Jovinian took of it; his pride was even greater, but whether God chastised him in his turn and he grew wise after, I know not.

X

THE REVENGE OF A QUEEN

I

It chanced on a day, that the King of Argos was hunting the boar in his tangled forests. Before the noon was over he had set his foot upon the third huge boar his steel had slain that day, then, wanting rest, he sat beneath the spreading oak trees on the green sward and king-like feasted with his folk around; nor lacked they for sweet music, for when the men's desires were satisfied with meat and drink, then began an old hunter and his son to tell of glorious deeds done in old days within the wood. As his tuneful words fell upon the ears of his listeners lifting the thoughts of each, and making each man seem noble unto his fellow, from afar there gleamed sun-lit arms, and between the singer's words they heard the slow tramp of a great horse and from a glade that pierced the thicket through, there drew in sight a mounted man.

The dogs growled, the hunters sprang to their feet handling their spears, but the King lay still, till the lonely man drew rein near the circle and with wild eyes gazed down upon the throng.

He seemed wearied, and his black war-horse had left both sweat and blood on many a mile, and now stood panting with drooping head, forgetting all the eager joys of speed. The rider's lordly coat was tattered, his broken sheath now held a sword no more, his once bright armour was spotted with rust, the yellow hair that crowned his head was unkempt and matted, nor wore he any helmet. His face, which should have been as fair and bright and ruddy as a maid's, was deadly white and drawn and haggard; his grey eyes stared as though he were sore afraid of something that other folk saw not.

One of the hunters cried out, "Who art thou? What god or man pursues thee? Stay and speak."

The rider cast a scared look behind, then said, "Stand close around me; I will tell my tale to your King when I may see him, unless indeed meanwhile my life should fail."

With these words, as one who hath but little strength, he alighted from his wearied steed.

They led him to the King, who stood upright now against a tree to see the new-comer. The stranger stared dreamily as one distraught, till cheerily the King spoke: "Cast off thy dreariness, O friend; sit and eat and drink and be my guest. I will not harm thee; let the gods or men take vengeance as they can without my help. I am a peaceful man dwelling between white-walled Argos and the woods."

The stranger turned round as if asking what these kind words meant; then casting here and there a troubled look as if he were not safe from some dread thing that still followed him, he sat down and ate like a starved man, yet he trembled as he took the food and cup. When his hunger was satisfied, throwing his hair back from his brow, he gazed at the King, and in a choked and husky voice said—

"Thou art kind, but kinder eyes I knew, that now are dead. Joy is gone; it had been best if thou hadst cast forth such a luckless one as I; for what I love, I slay; and what I hate, I try to save from out the hands of Fate. Listen!" and from his bent head there came slow words as if from one confessing shame—

"My life went past at Corinth, for there my father ruled from sea to sea. I had a brother,

like me in mind, face, and limb, whom men called Beller. Most true it is that with him I dwelt long in love and happiness. What plans we laid together for joyous victory! What lovely lands, untilled, we thought to win and rule together! How eagerly we sought news from old men, of lands that lay across the ocean-stream! And to us what folly seemed their cold words and hopeless eyes!

"In one fair room did we sleep at night, I and my brother. There, before the dawn, three nights together I dreamt a dream. Lying on my bed, I seemed to feel a cold hand laid upon me and a shape stood by my bed-head, a woman clad in grey. Her face and tall thin form were veiled. She drew me from my warm bed and led me shuddering, barefoot, over the floor until, with beating heart, I stood before my brother's bed, and knew what I should do. For from beneath her shadowy robe she drew a well-steeled feathered dart and thrust it into my hand. Unable to strive against her will, I madly drove it where her veiled hand pointed, into the heart of my own brother!

"I strove to scream, no cry came forth, but even with the stroke I nearly woke, till over me again was cast a dream. My room and all I

knew had passed away; I stood alone in a strange land, near an oak wood on a high hill. Far below my feet were the white walls of a glorious town built on a yellow shore washed by a green sea; and all, I thought, was a toy for me, and I was King of it. But as I stood upon that hill's green brow, rejoicing, once more all was changed. By the windy sea men were holding solemn games in honour of some hero passed away, whose body even then lay on a huge pile waiting for the torch. People far and wide along the shore were crying a name I knew not, lamenting him who once had been their King. But when I saw the face of the dead man I knew it for mine own!

"Shuddering with terror I awoke, a weight of fear lay on my heart. But when the next night and the third night came and still in sleep my visions were the same, no longer could I keep the story to myself, for fear possessed me. At first, it seemed good I should tell the dream to my brother, then I feared that he might look with changed eyes on me, thinking me false, or he might flee the land to save our house from such a wrong. Either way my dream seemed hard to tell.

"Then I thought of a certain elder, living some way out of Corinth, who had taught us

both and who loved us well. He was a priest of the goddess Diana and served her faithfully in her woodland shrine.

" With the coming of dawn I grew impatient to go to that old priest, so rising hastily from my bed I threw my cloak around me and went to the door, but as I passed through the fair porch I saw lying against the last brass-adorned pillar a feathered dart. New fear came into my heart, for just as the dart of my dreams this one was fashioned, decked at the end with green and scarlet feathers, and round the shaft were bands of silver. I picked it up that the old man might understand better how real my dream had been and give me wiser counsel.

" I went my way, and before the sun was up I was within the woods and hastening on to the old priest's house. But when I reached the little forest shrine I found my labour had been in vain, for there the priest's folk told me he had gone the eve before to Corinth, all alone, and on some important matter, they thought, for he had seemed troubled.

" His trouble troubled me, because I thought that to him sure news had been brought of some great danger hanging over me, and that he had gone to seek me while I was seeking him.

THE PROUD KING

"O King, [illegible] strange." *Page* 185.

"So toward the city I set my face again and rode through the woodland glades. It was now half-way between dawn and noon and I had come unto the wood's edge once more. Then upon the wind I seemed to hear the sound of voices drawing near. I stayed to hearken and cried out, but the sound from my parched throat was feeble. Listening again, no voices could I hear and tales of wood-folk began to vex my mind. But just as I shook my reins I heard those voices again, only nearer, and then from out the thicket stalked into the path a huge grey wolf that stood with yellow eyes glaring at me. I stared too; my folly made me see in him no wolf but some dread god, and I trembled in every limb. As his growling smote upon my heart, my fingers clutched tighter the dreadful dart. Standing up in the stirrups, I hurled the quivering shaft from my hand. Then fire seemed all around me, and a pang clutched my heart as from the thicket rang out a dreadful cry. Then clearly I saw that no wolf was there, but over the grass ran with staggering steps a pale and bleeding man. His left hand was held over the shaft within his bosom, his right raised against me as he fell close to my horse's hoofs. It was my brother I had slain, and that was his last farewell.

"What else?—it matters not. I saw the priest, and armed men from the thicket gathered around me with scared eyes fixed on mine. I drew my sword and sat there waiting for the dreadful word that would bid the rush of many men on me. They began to draw round silently, but before the circle was fully made, I felt the love of life stir up my heart again to hope and strife. I saw in one bright gleam the latter ending of my dreaded dream. So, crying out, I spurred my horse and as he reared, dashed forth amid a clatter of arms and cries. A spear flew over my bended head, a well-aimed arrow tore off my helmet; then a cry arose, 'Take him alive, nor bring a double shame upon the great house!' Just then I drove against a mighty man, as wave meets wave; back flew my right arm and my sword was gone. My horse reeled, but the man before me had been thrown, horse and rider lay on the ground. No one now was in my way as I spurred madly on, and in a short time, for I was nobly mounted, the race was won.

"O King, I think this happened only yesterday, yet now already do I feel it would have been better to have been slain, for I am weary and the gods made me a luckless man. Yet am

I so made, that, having life, I must cling to it still, though knowing that eternal rest of all things is the best. Slay me, King! I pray for this, slay me, and let the oak boughs say their say over my bones through the wild winter day!"

"Nay," said the King, "didst thou not eat and drink with me when hunger overcame thee? Yea, and didst thou not shrink when my men's spears were pointed at thy breast? Be patient; thou indeed shalt gain thy rest, but many things have got to come before then. Joy shalt thou have and sorrow: wherefore, come and ride with us to our lovely home. Dread not the gods; before long my priests shall purify thee. Come, then,—thou spakest of a kingdom won that thy dream foretold; shall not this be too, as well as the dreadful deed thou hast done? To horse! and let us to Argos; begin thy life afresh with me for friend. The world is wide, and not for many a day will every ill be cleared away. Surely a man like thee can win the joy that comes of conquering evil things."

To the King's words the stranger answered nought, but sat brooding, not seeming to hear. When the men brought his battle-horse to him, he mounted, and with set and weary face rode

as they bade him at the King's left hand. Not the sight of the fair well-tilled land nor Argos' walls as they rose from the fields, moved him from his mournful mood. He scarcely saw the fair gate of the city, dainty, yet so huge, nor did the well-ordered houses in the streets attract his eyes ; unmoved he saw the merchants' glittering train and the slim maidens round the fountain. The sight of the King's house, thought of all men to be a wonder among the houses kings had then, only drew from him a troubled frown. The carven gods within the banquet-hall, the storied hangings that bedecked the walls, made his heart sick.

That night he slept a while the sleep of sweet forgetfulness, and when next morn he woke, he felt himself somewhat less forlorn. Nor did the King forget him, but sent to the priests and told them his wish that this, his guest, should be purified since he was to live in honour in his house.

So the temple of Jove was made ready, and thither, amid songs and harp-playing, the stranger was brought, white-robed and barefoot, bearing in his hand a bough of olive. The white bulls were offered, a cloud of incense rose to the roof, the chanted prayers of men thrilled through the

brazen door. Herbs lay thickly scattered upon the floor, and in the midst at last the hero stood, freed of the guilt of shedding kindred blood. Then the chief priest cried, "*Bellerophon*, with this new hapless name that thou hast won, go forth, go free, be happy once again."

Bellerophon passed out wearily although the many prayers had set him free. Yet was he ready to forget and turn unto the days that might yet be.

When he came before the throne, the King called to him by his new name, "O fair Bellerophon, be wise and strive to win good things, lands riches, and a happy life."

"Ah, King," he said, "I know not what thing of hope or joy will fall to me. Be patient; perchance within a short time I may learn to smile even as thou, who lovest life so much. Who knows but grief may vanish at a touch as joy does."

"Yea," said the King, "thy heart shall love life when it grows like mine. But come thou hence and I will show thee what priceless treasures the gods have given to me. In seeing many lovely things thou mayst hide thy weary pain a little while."

So the King took Bellerophon outside his

palace and showed him his stables where the war-steeds stood in a row over the dusty grain; then to the armouries, where sword and spear and shield hung stainless, ready for the field. He showed him the treasury where were collected many strange and richly worked things, embroidered tapestries, ivory chairs, and beds of gold; and there he bade his tired eyes look upon the stories engraven on doors of brass; the flowers and images carved on the painted walls that told of things old and new, of things past and those yet to come.

But all the while Bellerophon's face was so grave and smileless, that even the King, when he watched his wandering eyes and heard his stammering speech, felt within his heart a feeling of anger mingled with scorn that one could be so crushed by fate.

At last they stood outside a door of precious wood, adorned with silver. Then the King laughed and said, "O guest, thy mood is hard to deal with; never has any one so striven to reach thy heart, and I grow weary and must get help!" He laid his hand upon the lock and pushed back the door. The two passed down the daintiest of passages, and as they went, they drew nearer the song of sweet-voiced women.

"Here," said the King, "thou mayst set thine eyes on such an one as will make thee think no more of days gone, but only of those to come; for here my wife watches the damsels in the weaving-house."

Across the exile's brow there came a frown, yet his eye grew brighter as the song grew louder and they neared the hall. The King smiled and led him hastily on to the door.

The hall within was nobly built, resting on a row of slim veined pillars. Through the marble lattice could be seen the green freshness of the summer sea sparkling in the sun, with the fishing-boats and a few black-bowed ships lying at anchor in the bay. In old bowls were placed bright rose-laurels, and humming round them a few bewildered bees that had stolen in from the sea.

In the centre rose a tree, gold-leaved, like that which bore strange fruit to the maids of Hesperus. From the root of it, a many-coloured serpent curled upward round the stem, then reaching over a square silver basin outpoured bright glittering water from his throat of brass. At each corner of the basin was a brazen hart that seemed about to drink.

Between this fountain and the pillars were the maidens. Their song had ceased now, only

a murmuring voice mingled with the noise of clicking loom and splashing fountain. One maiden was kneeling, watching the tinkling water as it fell into her brazen jar, ten others were busy at the spindles, while another was bringing in fresh, bright-dyed yarn to be spun. Above all this, on the downy cushions of a throne sat the fair Queen alone. She heeded not the work, but sat idly thinking. Her face was as of one who lies in peaceful sleep. Over her deep eyes no shadow came to trouble her white brow.

The King led Bellerophon in just as the old song began once more, and as they entered, the maiden nearest the door suddenly stopped singing and pressed her neighbour's arm that she might see what new folk came in. For this, an angry glance from the Queen's eyes fell upon her, so that Bellerophon had to look upon a cruel face when first he saw the Queen.

When the maidens saw the King they did him reverence and made way for him. He smiled, and now and then let fall a wandering glance upon some fair face. The Queen rose, and awaited them by her fair throne with eyes once more dreamy and free from care. The King spoke—

"My Queen, hither have I led a man, who, hurled down from a happy life, looks with sick eyes upon this happy world, not knowing how to stay here or depart. Thou knowest, and I know, how the wounded heart forgetteth pain and groweth whole again. Now since this man is noble even as we are, and worthy he seems to be a great King's friend, help me to make an end of his heavy mood. Kind words may help to make him kind unto himself; kind eyes may make him blind to what is ugly and tangled, and he may forget the things that he hath lost."

Gravely she sat to wait the end of the King's speech, and what scorn she may have had in her heart changed not her eyes, for they looked scorn on everything. While the cheery King told his tale, she glanced with disdain and wonder at the exile's face.

"O Prince," she said, "strive to get thy goodness back again; life flitteth fast, and while it lasts our folly hides many a good thing from us." Her smooth cheek was flushed, her eyes glittered as she gazed upon his pale and wondering face, and in his frank eyes saw a trouble like a growing hate. She grew calm, and in a false voice went on: "Surely hath my lord the King done well to bring thee here to tell to me thy

tale. Come then to the bower near by, there sweet music shall ease thy pain amidst our feast, and one shall read to thee of some great deed of pity the gods have done to us poor folk who dwell upon the earth, and my maidens shall dance for thee to the sound of the flutes."

Coldly and falsely her speech was begun, but something soft was in her voice as she strove to cast her net around his soul. He stood unmoved, but some thought crossed his weary mind that made him knit his brow.

"What love or friend can do me good?" he said. "I shall be hated by the gods and bring nothing but misery to all men. And thou, O King, and thou, O Queen, hearken to my words: my trouble shall surely fall on you if I abide with you, yet doubt it not that this your love for me shall never be forgotten and how ye have striven to win a helpless man."

The King only smiled. "Come, my guest," he said, "and by the great sea we will take our rest."

Three hours later, summoned by sound of horns they took their way to a bower looking westward and hung with trellised roses. Thither, too, came the false Queen with her maidens. She sat down beside the King and the feast passed with much delight. After the dancing-

maidens had left, there came with hurried steps into the hall the reader and her scroll. Sweet-eyed she was and timid; clad in gown of wool she sat down upon a stool at the feet of the proud Queen. With slender hand she put back her golden hair and began to read from off the parchment.

In a low voice and trembling at first she read a tale of lovers' lives spoilt by cruel gods. Her voice was like soft music, and when she sighed as she read some words of sorrow the stranger turned kind eyes upon her. At last she paused; as she drew near the bitter end of her story her voice failed, the scroll dropped from her hand. Folk held their breath till she should begin again, but her voice quivered through the air no more.

Round the maiden's neck the King cast a golden chain. The Queen, who had, at the beginning, seen Bellerophon's eyes fall gently upon the maiden, gazed with cold scorn upon her as she bent down to take the golden gift before she passed from the hall, while over the exile's face a pleased smile came.

From that fair night the time wore away until Bellerophon was won again to love of life and hope of joy. Still he was grave beyond his years, never eager to snatch at pleasure, a wary walker

on the road of life. The King gave him great gifts and much trust. All things prospered in his hand, never was there such another for strength and goodness. He would pass about the country here and there on matters for the King, never dwelling long at Argos, and that pleased him well, for while there the Queen would beset him with endless attentions which ill befitted her and caused him much trouble.

Once, choked with passion, she had stormed at him for being cold and heedless of her smiles, and he had been glad to remember that on the morrow he was to leave the shores of Argos for many months on a mission for the King.

When at last he had his helmet on and heard the folk cry out "Bellerophon!" as he passed toward the ship, the world to him seemed kind. He reached the border of the sea, and there took ship and was gone.

II

Now of Bellerophon it must be said that by great wisdom and boldness his task was done and much praise he gained. At last, amidst shouts and music and singing, in the first days of spring he passed up once more from the

crowded shore to the palace. The King met him half-way and embraced him in face of all the people, calling him his dear son, and praising the gods for all that he had done. Then hand in hand the two passed up the street, and folk cast sweet spring-flowers on their heads, while bands of maidens met them with joyous song, and all this for joy in the safe return of the brave Corinthian Prince.

But Bellerophon had returned to Argos only to suffer unjustly through the words of a scornful Queen. She saw him often, and despite her words and smiles no affection could she win from him. In jealous rage and wounded pride she accused him to the King of being a base friend, false to him and false to her, and one not worthy of the great trust placed in him. So well did she tell her wicked tale that the King believed it true.

He groaned, and with head sunk in his hands sought what best to do.

"What shall I do?" he cried. "I trusted him; what truth there seemed in him! Must I slay him, then, him whom I loved above all earthly men? Might he not die in war?—Nay, but my lands are all at peace. A friend! and false! Ah! In Lycia shalt thou die; her

father's hand shall draw the sword, or give command to make an end of thee. So shall it be, and a swift ship ready now for sea shall bear thee hence. Would I had never known thee! Fare thee well!"

So saying, slowly the King rose and took his writing tools, and before the day had fully dawned he wrote two letters; the first one was open, and it said these words:—

"*Unto the wise Bellerophon,*

"*To Lycia the gods call thee, O my son; so when thou hast this letter in thine hand, abide no longer in the Argive land, but make good speed to that swift ship that saileth this same day for the South. Take this gold, and for a token show the seamen my seal. Bear this casket to the Lycian King, it hath in it a thing of greatest worth; let no hand touch it but thine till it rests in the King's hand, then bid him remember how that he had of me the fellow key to that which in mine hands doth open it. Mayst thou do well among these stranger men; perchance thou never more shalt see my face, perchance but little more remains of thy loved life. If woe befalls thee there, think none the less that I have brought thee happiness. Farewell! Ask not to see me first.*"

Another letter by the King's side lay closed and sealed. Summoning a servant, he bade him lead toward the treasury and take with him two leather bags. There, the King laid the sealed letter within a casket of steel and gold and locked it; then told his fellow to fill the bags he bore with gold.

Returning to the palace, he bade the servant bring his hunter's cloak and saddle the fleetest horse, "and see," he said, "before the Prince arise that ye show him this letter and give these things into his hands. Make good speed, the time grows short."

He hurried to the porch and paced feverishly up and down, fearing to meet Bellerophon before his horse was brought. Then he heard the horse-boy's cheery cry and the sharp clatter of his horse's well-shod feet. He ran out and mounted and rode forth he scarce knew where, until the town was passed and the green corn-fields came into view.

When Bellerophon awoke that morn he felt weary as though he bore some heavy load. Before he went down to meet the day the servant brought him the letter. He read, and knit his brows in anxious thought, for in his mind that letter brought great doubt of the King's friend-

ship, and great anger rose in his soul. Three times he read the letter; at last he spoke: "Sir, even as the King now bids me I will make no delay, and as I came to Argos, even so, unfriended, will I go. Few farewells are best today. Get we gone and tell the King his full will shall be done."

They rode forth, and ever as the way lengthened behind them the summer day grew hotter on the lovely earth, and the fresh soft air and sounds and sights worked on Bellerophon until it seemed that things might not after all be as he had thought at first. "Yea," he thought, "I may see his face again, and come back crowned with honour to this shore. I fear nothing,—if he thinks ill of me, another day will show the truth of all. The world is wide and I am young. Now go I forth alone to do what in my life must needs be done; in my own hands lies my fate, I think."

With these thoughts he came to the ship, and higher sprang his new ambitions when first he saw the sea leap up against the black sides of the ship and heard the sails flap in the breeze, and the voice of the seamen, who, at the sight of him, broke into shouts of joy.

The money was given up, the King's seal

shown, and on the deck stood the brave Corinthian as the great rings ran up the mast. The helmsman took the tiller, the head swung round, the great sail spread, the broad bows pierced the sea, and Bellerophon stood at the stern bidding farewell to field and hill and wood and white-walled Argos growing small astern.

But when the King's man, with a doubtful smile, had watched the parting sails a little while, he turned about, thinking many things over in his mind, because the Prince's glory seemed to have grown dim. This parting seemed to him to be in no wise fitting. "Day-long leave-taking there should have been," he grumbled. "Has Bellerophon won too great fame? or what thing else has happened?"

However, he returned slowly to Argos, saying here and there of how Bellerophon had gone away, perchance never to return, and sore hearts there were, and many prayed that he still might fare well wherever he was; very few forgot him for many a day.

The Queen took the news coldly at first, and sat among her maids as before, dreaded, unloved, but as the days wore on she took to wandering restlessly by the sea.

At last one day her maids came in the early

morn, to do what should be done in the Queen's room,—water for the bath, and dainties brought, such as gold combs, embroidered cloths and pearls. But when they were within the door they found the bed empty beneath the golden canopy, and when one maid drew near she saw it had been untouched that night. They searched the other rooms in vain, and called to others of the household and asked if they had tidings of the Queen.

Maids and men passed with troubled eyes down the stair and through the postern door into the garden. There upon the ground and on a jagged bough of creeping vine they saw gold threads and silken embroidery that they knew well were torn from the Queen's gown. Then by the gate where the sweetbrier-rose grew thick were fragments of dainty silk fluttering on the thorns in the light breeze. Footprints they could see plainly beneath the wall, but little could the close-cropped summer grass tell them of feet that might have passed, so, splitting up their band, some took the way to the fields, others seaward went, and some turned their steps to the wood.

The search was vain; the Queen was gone. The gods are kind and will not suffer men to find

all things they search for; but an old fisherman told this tale to his wife that day:—

"When last night I had laid the boat up beneath the high cliff and had made all things trim, I set out to bear my fish to Argos. Nought befell at first, but when the night had well come on I entered the beech wood which stands on the cliff's edge. When I had gone half-way, I stood still, for I heard a sound as though one moaned in bitter need. I peered about and turned toward the sea, then my heart sank, for by the tree that stands nearest the edge stood a white figure, a daughter of misery. I had no power to move. Now she moaned and moaned.

"The day was dawning, and I saw her set her hand to her waist and take the girdle thence. Her face was turned from me, but I heard her speak these words—

"'Unto him the worst deed have I done of all the ill deeds I have done on earth. But now rejoice, the Argive Queen is dead.'

"I started forward as she said that word, and she beheld me,—face to face we met in the grey morning light, nor shall I forget those dreadful eyes. Her lips were red, her cheeks looked soft and smooth, but despair and hate were in her eyes. I shook so that my hands could

scarcely hold the staff and half-filled basket that I bore.

"In a moment, slowly she turned round and went toward the sea, and I, although I knew well her intent, could not stir. There on the brink she stood; I could see the jewels gleam in the torn folds of the glittering hem of her gown. Now she raised her arms, and to and fro she swayed her slender body. Then I moved at last and hurried toward the steep cliff's edge, but before I reached it she was gone, and, hanging over the rugged edge with trembling hands, far down I beheld a white thing meet the dark grey waves.

"When I rose again I saw the girdle hanging to the bough. This I loosed and took, and went my way. Behold it! What way, wife, seems best to thee? We are poor, these bright stones would make us happier, yet danger hangs thereby. How sayest thou? Shall I go unto the King and tell him every word about the thing?"

"Nay, nay, nay," said the wife, "meddle thou not, but down the beach run thy boat, hang the heaviest weight about the belt, then go and in the deepest of the green bay drop it. We will abide peaceful, if toilsome, still."

So was it done. The sea hid the Queen from all but those two, who died with their tale untold.

Time passed away, and dimmer grew her name day after day.

XI

THE LOVE OF A PRINCESS

I

You have heard how Bellerophon left Argos with scorn rather than anger in his heart, but with new-born courage, and hope that he might yet be able to cope with life's wild tangle and not be wholly beaten in the end.

Now the evening sun shines fair upon him in Lycia as he goes up from the quays beneath the curious gaze of the folk gathered there, well pleased with all the fair things that his eyes beheld. With the ship's company he came to the King's hall, built high above the market-place. They had no trouble in getting speech of the great King without delay, for he was ever anxious to learn of new-comers about things beyond his kingdom.

Bellerophon passed in through the hall, seeming a very god among men. He was clad in a

dark blue kirtle over which was a grey cloak, and on his head was a bright steel helmet; his great sword's hilt was bright with gold and gems. His right hand bore a great shafted spear, and in his left shone the casket from the King of Argos. His face was grave, though it now wore a flickering smile. Thus through the Lycian court-folk they went till they came to the King, a man of sixty summers, with beard and hair as white as snow. Down on the seafarers he gazed with curious peering eyes, and now and then smiled and nodded as he saw such men among them as he knew in other days.

When he met Bellerophon's frank gaze his eyes rested there, and he said, "O guest, though among these thy attire is not the best, yet I know that thou must be that Bellerophon who lately hath won such praise among men at Argos. Two months ago thy name reached our country adorned with many tales of deeds of thine. How sayest thou?"

"So am I called," Bellerophon answered. "As for my deeds, O King, what I have done is but a little thing; I worked that I might live from day to day, that something I might give in return unto my lord, from whom I bring to thee a message written by him privately and hidden

in this casket. Take it from my hand and do thou worthily to this my company and let us soon depart, for I am eager to gain the good report of other men through the wide world. And do not thou keep me here as one whom the King of Argos holds dear, because I fear that I have done amiss to him, though in what way I have sinned I know not. True it is he bade me flee, and before I went he would not see my face. Therefore, I bid thee, King, have a care lest thou shouldst bring trouble on thyself for sheltering me."

"Sweet is thy voice," said the King, "nor will our honour let thee go away whatever thy deed is, though I deem full well there is little ill of thee to tell. Give me the casket; in good time we will see this message of the King of Argos and do what seemeth good therein. Sit, O guests, for supper doth begin! Marshals, give them room; but thou, sit here and rejoice with me, forgetting thy cares, for truly just now in thy voice was wrath, and anger mingles ill with our short-lived spell of bliss."

Then Bellerophon sat down and thought how fate had brought his wandering footsteps to such another place as Argos, and he wondered what the end of this would be. But the time was

fair, he cast away fear and was blithe and glad in that bright company. The King blessed the tide that set so merry a fellow by his side.

The next day, in honour of the guest, the King bade all his folk to a joyous festival. Nine days passed in wrestling, running, and other deeds of manly strength, and if one seemed to gain a victory over Bellerophon he knew it was only granted him in courteous mockery, for all who wrestled with the hero found him too strong for mankind to conquer.

But when the ninth day had passed and the sun had risen on the next morn, the King sent for Bellerophon, who at once went and found him with a troubled face pacing the room from end to end. He turned as Bellerophon drew near and said in a low voice, "What dost thou here? This is a land beset with many dangers, hast thou no wish to save thy joyous life? The wide sea is before thee, get thee gone; all lands are good for thee but this alone!"

As the hero strove to catch his eye and began to speak, the King passed him hurriedly by and went from the room. With a smile Bellerophon turned too, and, after a time, when he could gather breath from such a speech, said, "Far then could the arm of the King of Argos reach;

so was it as I thought, but not every king gets all that he desires. The Lycian land shall not be stained with my blood. The gods are good though far they drive me forth ; but south, west, east, north are all alike to me, who have no one to mourn above my grave where'er I fall. Fair things shall I see yet, nor may great deeds be lacking unto me. Would I were gone, then ! "

But with that last word, he heard light footsteps drawing swiftly near. He raised his eyes, then, staggering back amazed, caught at the wall and wondered if he dreamed, for there before his very eyes he seemed to see the Argive Queen draw nigh. But as he wondered, a soft voice reached his ears, and then he knew that in one mould the gods had fashioned two, but given them hearts unlike. Her eyes, too, looked on his troubled face in no way like the other's ; these were wistful and shy. She spoke softly thus :

" Far have I sought thee, O Corinthian man, and now that I have found thee, my words fail." She paused, her half-closed lips were as sweet as the sweet words she uttered. She flushed and spoke once more falteringly, with eyes bent upon the floor.

" O Prince Bellerophon, I dreamed last night

that I beheld thee dead. I knew thee thus, for twice had I seen thee in this festivity; and since I know how loved a man thou art, here have I come to bid thee depart while thou canst."

Nearer he came and said, "O fair lady, I am but a name to thee, as men are to the gods above, and what then moved thy heart thus to speak to me?" His voice seemed strange, and the maid answered not at first, but grew pale, her lips quivering. At last, with eyes fixed full upon him, thus she spoke:

"This did I for thy sake, because thou art the worthiest of all men. Hear me then, and speak not before my tale is finished. I dreamed I dwelt within the Lycian land, and about me on either hand were poisonous serpents, yet I had no fear of them, for in my head the thought was that they were my kith and kin. But as I went, I thought I saw thee coming towards me not seeing the serpents. In vain I strove to speak and bid thee go unto the sea where thy men were ready with the sails. But in my dream thou camest unto me so quickly and I smiled and talked, and talked and smiled though all the while I beheld a serpent draw near to strike thee. While I trembled with joy at thy presence, in my ears rang out a dreadful cry, and suddenly thou

layest dead at my feet. This is my dream; hast thou heard me? Abide no more, I say, among these men."

She turned her eager, glistening eyes away and hurried past, and as her feet bore her loveliness away, he seemed to hear a sob come from her; as for him, he felt he dwelt in some fair haven all his own, as though he had never known any sorrow, so happy and triumphant had he grown. Of other things he strove to think in vain,—the strange threatening of the King seemed as nothing. "Here in the land of Lycia dwells my bliss," he thought; "so much she loved me that she wished me gone that I might live."

With a passionate sigh he turned from the place where her feet had been and passed out through a low door into a little garden. There, between the trees and blossoms he walked, nursing his love, until the thought of departing came into his mind, and he laughed aloud with scorn of it. Back he turned into the house to find the King once more and crave for leave to serve him.

But when he drew near the hall, he found a crowd of men gathered round it; armed indeed they were, but rent and battered was their armour. Some lacked weapons altogether, some

leant in weakness against the pillars, some were so spent with weariness and pain that they wept, many wore bandages through which the red blood trickled.

Wonderingly Bellerophon passed through these folk into the hall, where on the ivory throne sat the King with flushed face gazing down upon the shrinking captains. As Bellerophon entered, the King's eyes fell upon him with a troubled start at first, then, forgetting the part he had played that morn, a gracious smile came over his face and he spoke: "Look upon these men, O wise Bellerophon, and ask them what glory they have won, or ask them not, but listen unto me.

"Over the distant mountains there is a town where dwell a folk baser and more vile than men can tell. They are a godless, thankless people; unhelped they live, and to others give nothing but curses. A people without a leader! that, till now, I called a feeble folk and bondsmen of mine own! But now behold from this same godless town are these my men come empty-handed back and left with these unskilled folk no lack of well-wrought swords and silk attire and gold.

"Lo, now, thou hast spoken of wandering

forth again—rather be thou my man, and against these men lead thou mine army. If thou dost well, great praise shall be thine, for they will have grown so bold since their victory of yesterday that if thou winnest, a great deed thou shalt do, and great will thy reward be. Wilt thou go? Methought thou hadst a wish to serve me here."

As Bellerophon drew nearer, he thought, "Ah, then I know why he would have me go. He wishes for my death. Safer am I though, in armour, with sword in hand, than midst the silken hangings of this fair court that well I know hide many poison-stings." Then he spoke out:

"O King, wilt thou then pray to all the gods to give me a good day? For when I was a youth and dwelt at home, men thought I knew somewhat of things to come, and now methinks I see more dangers than any that have yet been thrust on me."

The King frowned and flushed red as if against his will, but quickly said in a mild voice—

"Be of good cheer, O son, for if the gods help not Bellerophon, it will not be for lack of my prayers for their goodwill. Every altar in

the land shall smoke with sacrifice while thou art absent from us. These men, worn as they are, yet desire to try again as soon as may be. My armoury is not empty ; there are unwounded men to help thee, and my household-folk shall go with thee. None but women shall be in my house until the Lycian shield once more is clean through thee, as though no stain had ever been. Canst thou be ready by the second day ? "

" So be it," said the wise Corinthian ; " and here, O King, I make myself thy man ; may the gods make us faithful. Now, for thy part, see thou that we who go have everything enough, and think not to hear too soon of victory. Give me leave, for I would pass my men in order by me and find how best I may bind thy wounded honour."

The King made haste to say, " May the gods bless us both as I bless thee, who at this time givest good help to me. Depart, brave man, and, doing but thy best, howe'er the tide of battle goes, by me thou shalt be blest."

Then Bellerophon went and laboured hard to inspire courage into the failing hearts of the Lycian folk. When the next bright day was nearly over, within the brazen porch he stood while the evening breeze cooled his weary

brow. He was alone, thinking of his love, and longing for some deed to prove the truth of it, midst all the stir of men and clash of arms. While he was thus thinking, there, in the dusk, across the green garden, fluttered a white figure. He thought of her and that by chance she was coming to him, but soon a woman drew near and he could see it was his lady's handmaid, and with a frown he was turning away, when she cried, "O fair my lord Bellerophon, stay and hearken,—here my lady sendeth me and saith these words:

"'*The daughter of the Lycian King doth give thee this fair blade and prayeth for thy health and happiness. As for this sword, draw it not forth before base man or lord, but be alone when first it leaves its sheath. Yet since upon it lieth life and death, surely thou wilt not long delay to unsheath it.*'"

He felt the cold hilt put into his hand and she was gone. He waited no longer, and presently was alone in his room. There for a while he stood looking with a loving smile at the well-wrought sword enriched with gold and gems, then by the taper's light he drew it from its sheath. Between it and the blade lay a letter which he opened with eagerness and read:

" Short is the time and it will be nightfall before thou readest this. If thou wouldst live, gird this sword upon thee and go down to the quay and there walk to and fro until a seafarer meet thee with two behind him bearing torches. He shall see the sword and say to thee, ' Is it drawn forth? ' and ye shall answer, ' Yea, truly, and the wound is healed.' Then shall he bring thee straight to his ship, which with loose sails doth wait thy coming, and shall give thee a good store of gold and at once leave the Lycian shore. Farewell, I would have seen thee, but I feared two things : first, that we might be heard by green trees and by walls, and thus I should have brought thee death not safety ; the second, love hath made me weak."

He read the piteous letter again and again till tears filled his eyes ; he set the well-kissed sword within his belt and was more determined than ever to await his fortune in the Lycian land. With hand upon his sword, he took his way to the hall, and as he made his way through the crowd feasting there, the shouts of his name rose higher and higher around him.

Beside the King he sat a little while and spoke of this and that, and at last he cast a few proud words to the feasting folk and bade them feast

no more, but, going thence, make ready to live or die like men. He departed, and for half the night went hither and thither making all things ready, and then he fell into a short dreamless sleep till the trumpet roused him in the morn almost before the summer sun had risen.

He passed out with his men through the gate of the fair city, thronged with anxious weeping women. As he rode, he gazed once back to the palace standing huge in the fresh and windy morning sky.

II

Seven days of fear wore by; the Princess grieved for news of the army. Then on the eighth day, at the stroke of noon, a little band of stained and battered men passed through the gate into the town again, and left glad hearts as well as anxious ones behind them as they clattered over the stones to the palace. There they found the King on his throne, with ancient lords around him.

"O King, rejoice!" they cried, "at last thy banner is raised that men had cast to the ground. As safely mayst thou lie within the city beyond the mountains as in this house, for all things there are thine now."

Then the King rose and filled a cup with wine and said, "All praise be to the gods! Yet ere I drink, tell me, how goes it with our folk? Did many die before they laid the yoke on those proud necks? When will they come again?"

"O King," they answered, "though they fell not in vain, yet many fell; but even now our fellows are on the way back. I think they will be here on the third day; they must needs be slow, for they have with them large waggons full of spoil, arms, fair attire and wrought gold, beside many men and women prisoners."

"What sayest thou now about Bellerophon?" asked the King. "Is he alive?"

Then the man turned pale and said, "He liveth, and of small use are man's weapons against him. On the wall he stood alone, for we fell backward before the fury of our foes. We thought ourselves brought there only to die and could not bear it. Then it was as though, amidst the noise and darts, a clear bright light glowed about his head, and he turned a face to us that burned with such glory that those behind us drove us back again and cried aloud to die there rather than leave him. With that, a desperate war went on till they could save nothing from us."

The King listened at first as one waiting for the worst, but when he had heard his servant's tale right through, he poured the wine and cried, "Take this, in token of the greatness of our happiness, and as a pledge of the gifts that shall be given to thee and to our noble friends who thus our name have saved."

He who told the tale lingered a while, thinking the King had yet something more to say, but as no fresh word came, he turned away and with great men and lords made merry, praising wind and wave that brought Bellerophon to their shores to save their name.

When the day came that the gates were flung back on their hinges, the people pressed forward with eager faces to welcome back the hero. He wondered how such glory came to him and why folk gazed upon him as a god and would have kissed the ground on which he trod. It seemed to him a little thing to fight against hard things, and he fell into a dreamy musing amidst all the shouts and glitter.

Think how the fair Princess felt now amid the din of this festivity, when she heard the voice of triumph and the people's maddening noise round her returning love. She wandered in the garden through the day; her colour came

and went; she trembled when she heard some louder shout of joyous men. Then she grew weary of the sun; the brook ran in vain across her feet; the ice-cold well quenched not her thirst; the scent of half-blown roses was not sweet enough. The sun sank low; wearily she lay down that night, but slept not. Yet in the morn the new sun seemed to bring a joy to her, something unnamed, better than rest or peace, for in her heart she knew that he had part in all her thoughts.

Beneath the palace wall there was a place where dewy was the daisied grass even at noon, for a high round tower cast a long shadow over that spot of ground. Lilies grew there and woodbine and the sweet-scented eglantine. Lonely and silent was the garden there, and thither love led the Princess.

Presently a clear, well-loved voice rang out above the singing of the birds. She leaned her slim and perfect daintiness against the grey tower and waited. Clad in green he came that morn, and at his side there hung a glittering horn, a mighty unbent bow was in his hand, while over his shoulders he carried his long arrows. Great joy was in his eyes. Face to face they stood a while, at last she spoke—

"Thou comest, then, to say how now thou wilt be wise and go away even as I bade thee; the prey has escaped the net this time, but be wise, the fowler hath yet other wiles."

"Yea," said he, "it was indeed thou who thought of me in my need; strange then that now thou biddest me begone! Yet thou art kind, thou thinkest I may yet find other friends. Alas! life goeth fast; not every day do we behold folk standing in the way with outstretched hands to meet us."

"Ah!" she said, "how kind thou art! Yet the dead are dead, but the absent are but dead a little while. Then get thee gone from wrong and guile, and we shall meet once more in happier days. Some hate is round thee here, some undeserved strange fate awaits thee in Lycia!"

"Fear not," he said, "not yet my days are done! When I stood alone on that deadly wall driving back the traitors, I felt as though within me there dwelt such a life as scarce could end. Lift that glorious head and look upon me! Put away the thought of time and death and think of me as being ever as I am now. I will not go away; be merry, we shall live to see our love conquer all danger."

Now she wept, but, starting midst her tears, she stooped and listened like a bird that hears a danger on the wind. The round tower now cast a lesser patch of shade upon the daisies, folk were stirring about the palace; the Princess turned and with a sob and long faithful look, but no farewell, she swiftly walked away. But he, left alone beneath the tower, stooped and kissed her footprints on the grass, then passed with swift steps through the garden, thinking great things; nor knew he till that hour how sweet life was.

The days that followed were glorious for Bellerophon, who was loved and praised by all.

Now on a certain day every year was held a feast and sacrifice unto the goddess Diana. On that day the market was empty, the haven deserted; all took part in the great festival, as with song and shout and winding of great horns the golden statue of the goddess was drawn by white oxen amidst a band of bare-kneed maidens with bended bow in hand and quiver at their back. These would seize, as if by force, three damsels chosen by lot, bind their hands and take them to the temple of Diana. There the priest would lead them to the altar and midst old songs would raise on high the knife as if to slay, when

through the great door would come a cry from the King and a great company who offered ransom for the maidens,—a great golden horn, a silver image of a flowering thorn, three white harts with golden antlers, a silk gown for a huntress, every fold worked thick with gold and gems; then to and fro an ancient song was sung to bid men know that the goddess had no need of such things. In the end the maidens all were freed, the harts slain in their place, the dainty things were hung over the altar from silver rings, and then in festivity and joyful songs the solemn day went by.

On the morn of the festival the city was full of joy, nor did men look for anything to come to pass more than had happened in other years. But lo! there was a change! When in the car of cedar-wood decked with green boughs the golden goddess stood and the white oxen strained to move the car, they could not, though they had drawn easily more than twenty times that weight.

The priests prayed to the goddess to allow the rites to proceed, but all in vain; the car could not be moved, and the sacrifices had to be made where it stood. For a time all things went well, the three maidens were seized and carried to the

shrine, then one of them suddenly fell down before the altar screaming. From the frightened folk that filled the street a clamour arose. Such a thing had ne'er been seen before. Some shouted for the maiden to be slain who had thus offended the goddess. Then one of the three harts tossed himself free of the priest's hand and would have escaped, but a soldier from the King's band thrust his spear into the beast's heart, crying—

"O foolish goddess, thou knowest not men's ways, putting away their gifts as if they were nothing. Think not that we shall continue to pray to thee and offer thee gifts with trembling hands. Get thee gone to other lands where folk will have thee."

He stooped and drew out his weapon, then turned and walked away. No man knew his name or whence he came. The people broke up into frightened groups; even the priests slunk away afraid, fearing the vengeance of the goddess.

Slowly the clouds gathered in the sky, great drops fell from a black cloud's hem, a lightning flash gleamed down the street, the thunder clattered, and hushed was the murmuring crowd. Many fell on their knees and prayed, some set

off running to the quays that they might go they knew not where or why. Such rain fell from the sky as though some river of the upper world had burst its banks. The furious south wind tore along the ground, blowing the rain-spray to the sea.

Then the wind grew steady, though fast still fell the rain, till trembling and shivering with cold all folk went home, and soon the golden maid stood lonely in the rain-beaten way amid drenched cloths and garlands.

Prince Bellerophon upon that day had gone unto the hills to spend the hours hunting, for as he was a stranger in the city he could take no part in the sacred rites. As he stood upon a hilltop, he saw the sky in the east grow blacker and blacker, and he thought it wise to go before the rain drew near. But as he turned a jagged streak of lightning lit up the woods and rocks about him.

He looked around; below him were fair fields and homes of toiling men, and woods and broad bright streams. The air was clear now with the coming rain, and as he turned, once more eastward on the horizon, like a spark, some flame broke out against the dark storm-clouds and seemed to grow beneath his eyes. He stood gazing and

saw across the sky another and another flame burst forth, then the three ran into one that shot upwards yet spread farther at either end. To himself he said—

"Ah, is it so, then? I shall soon be marching into warlike lands, for this is the work of an enemy. I must hasten back to the foolish people who trust in me."

He mounted and rode off at full speed down the slopes, through pelting rain and howling wind. He reached the city gate and went on to the palace to hear from pale lips tales of all that fearful day. Then he told them of the fire he had seen, and bade them make ready for some war, but the people listened coldly to his words.

At dead of night the grey clouds drew apart, the moon shone brightly over a dripping world. Then clattering horse-hoofs came to the eastern gate, and one called loudly to the guard to open. But the warders sat fast and spoke no word, too fearful to open the gates. Cries of wild entreaty rose from those outside the walls—

"Open, O open, ye who sit in peace! Do ye not see the red sky at our backs? Open, we are spent! Do ye not hear? Open, Lycian men!"

With staring, frightened eyes the warders sat, but as they cowered there a clash of steel coming

from within the town fell on their dull ears, and more afraid they grew. Soon, before them stood a shining one in arms with wrathful eyes beneath his bright helmet.

"Why sit ye here like this, O Lycians?" he cried; "get ye home, ye are all turned to women truly, cowards all! Get to the tower-top, look through the night, and ye shall see the sky all red and murky beneath the moon." Even as he spoke there came again the smiting on the door, and as the sword leapt from Bellerophon's sheath, for he it was, again the cry smote on their ears—

"Lycians, are ye no longer within your guarded town? We heard a voice just now as of one who bade us not be feared. Will ye open, then? Do ye not hear that noise of fire upon the wind?"

Then, as if maddened, they rained down hard blows upon the unyielding oak, and the scared guards shrank back behind the men Bellerophon had brought with him. Sheathing his bright blade, he shot back the bolt and stepped swiftly aside; back the gates fell on their hinges, and a wretched throng, cowering and breathless, stood horse and foot among the glimmering spears. When the gates were again shut fast behind them, Bellerophon cried out—

"O men, ye have fled full fast, and who are these that make you so tremble?"

Then an old man of the company spoke. "Fair sir, thou speakest manfully, but what scorn shall we get from thee when thou hast heard that these who pursue us with fire and sword are *women*!"

Bellerophon laughed loudly. "Tremblers all," he cried, "afraid of women! Throw the gates open wide, fearful hearts, and let us out."

"Ay, laugh," said the old man, "while your eyes have not beheld the miseries these days have brought us. If I tell thee half the dreadful things that have befallen us, ye will not listen. If I tell the shape of these cruel monsters, ye will not believe; but hearken to this, such foes are on you now that, bound together by a dreadful vow, will slay yourselves and wives and little ones and build themselves temples with your sun-bleached bones."

Then cried Bellerophon in wrath, "To horse! To horse! O Lycians! Stay thou here, O captain, and guard gate and wall. We are enough. Tell thou the King that when I come again these lips will have much to tell; let him have care that this his city is not left bare of men or food or arms. I might say more, but the moon

sinks fast, the day is near, so get we speedily to that redness in the eastern sky."

A shout arose when he had finished, and he rode forth with the few followers he had laboured to collect, stout hearts who loved him well.

Once more he drew his sword from its sheath, the gates swung backward at his shouted word, and on he led his men to fame or death.

III

The sun rose, men's eyes fell on uprooted vines and fields trampled into mire, the work of evil-doers. Terror fell on the city; rich men thronged to the noisy quays with their treasures, bargaining with the sailors to take them away from danger. Heaps of silver and costly raiment were piled on the decks; here and there a ship was moving out with white sails spreading in the breeze, and on the prow, yearning for the sea and other lands beyond, would stand some trembling lord. The King was told of this, and sent at once a trusty captain with armed men to the quays to prevent any one leaving. Every gate was shut and guarded, so that flight was now impossible.

The roads were full of homeless country-folk,

women with pale faces, scared and worn and desolate. At sundown the sky was lit with dreadful light, tales of horror grew greater, the city could summon up no will to fight or flee.

Night came at last, a night of unrest. The people pressed upon the armed men at the gate and quays until they were forced to yield, and many a laden ship slowly sailed away, while redder grew the sky with every hour. So passed the fearful night ; some, made brave, caught up shield and spear, and, leaderless, went forth into the flame. The gates were left ajar, and through the streets went the warders, armed but helpless. When the next day was nearly done and the foe came not, once more hope sprang up within men's breasts. The walls seemed good, the great gates more than iron and wood, and with returning hope there came back shame at their fear. They took up once more their spears and thought of the god-like man who had done so great a deed in their midst, and who had even now ridden forth so carelessly to see what their terror was.

So at sunset the men gathered once more into ordered bands, women's hands carried stones up to the ramparts where glistened now helmets and spear-heads instead of pale and anxious faces. The King came forth among his lords, and thus

the Lycians in some order waited through the night, the sky showing less sign of the foe. So hope grew.

At dawn the King bade them bring offerings to Diana, and the smoke of the sacrifice curled over the bowed heads of the praying folk. At noon, a messenger pressed through the wondering waiting crowd, drew near the King and gave to him a scroll he carried, not stopping to do homage or to speak. Then from his saddle he leapt heavily to the ground as one weary from want of sleep. In expectant silence the people waited while the King read the scroll.

" Praise to the gods," he cried, " hearken all.

" ' *Good health and happiness to the Lycian King and all his people, and every wished-for thing Bellerophon wisheth thee and saith : From out the valley of the shade of death I am come again to make you glad. Now the land is cleansed of such a pest as has not been before ; be glad and rest, and look to see us back in seven days' time, for still must we stay a while to chase the remnant of the women that ye feared.*' "

A moment's silence followed that last word, then a joyous shout rent the air. Men and women, old and young, filled the temples with their praises, and in the twilight, with prayers

THE LOVE OF A PRINCESS.

"LIFT THAT GLORIOUS HEAD AND LOOK UPON ME." *Page* 230.

and hymns, they brought the great-eyed, white, slow-going oxen and yoked them to Diana's car again. Down went the horned heads, axles creaked, and folk cried out with joy to see the wheels go round. Gladness was in every heart as the goddess took her way amid the torch-lit, flower-strewn street.

The time passed slowly until the promised day of Bellerophon's return. The city was made ready for that hour ; minstrels and dancers met the hero and his men at the city gates. Amid joyous shouts, Bellerophon in battered armour came, laurel-crowned and sword in hand, riding his great black horse. Behind him came the prisoners,—hideous women clad in warlike raiment, in scales of brass and skins of beasts. Some were great-limbed and mighty to behold, with long black hair and low brows ; some were bald-headed, old and wizened, yet all adorned with gold. One was clad in a rich gown of some slain woman, and at her belt, hung by its flaxen hair, was a Lycian's head.

On a brazen car sat an old woman with hair white and blood-stained; her chained hands carried an axe, and at her feet lay a monstrous crown of heavy gold, the sign of her royalty. From such a sight many hid their eyes.

Then came the feast in the great hall, where one and all, women and men, gave welcome to Bellerophon.

The Princess took his hand and in clear and tender speech praised him for his deed.

So passed the day, and others too. But now when this great trouble had gone by, the Princess began to fear her father's wiles again. The King would go to his treasury and stand with knitted brows gazing on the casket from the King of Argos. "There is time yet," he thought, "to slay the man who saved our life and happiness. Once I cast him into death, and he won nothing then but victory. Another time, and death passes him by; yet once again shall it be tried before I strive no more, but bear the punishment that is sent on those who break their oaths."

In peace and joy the summer wore away, nor did folk remember how it was foretold that in the days to come three great dangers should there be within the bounds of Lycia.

Summer slipped into fair autumn, more fruitful than its wont, barns and stores ran over with the good things of the earth. The quays were crowded with merchandise, and in prosperity and health the people dwelt.

But on a day as the King sat in his judgment hall he heard a clamour by the outer door. It was a band of country-folk. He gave command that one of the new-comers should be brought in. He came before the ivory seat, and very scared he seemed to be. His face was full of misery as he stared with open eyes at the King.

"What wilt thou?" said the King.

Twice did the man's lips open as if to speak, but no sound came; the third time a husky trembling sound came from them, but no words that could be understood by the wondering crowd around.

"The man is dazed with fear," said the King, "bring him wine; we must hear what new thing has happened. Take heart, man, thou art safe!"

The stranger raised the bowl they brought him with trembling hand and drank, and then a while he stood silent amid the silence. At last he began in a weak voice—

"I am a poor and toiling man; therefore my trouble may seem little to thee. In early summer when those foul women laid waste the land far and wide, I saved myself, my wife and my little ones, and went to the west where my brother dwelt. He had a vineyard there whose

blossoming in March was full and fair. May's frost touched it not nor July's hail. It stretched up the sunny south slopes of a hill, on the top of which was a thin wood of oak trees, where lived many beasts, but a wall well built of stones guarded the vineyard. At the bottom of the hill ran a full stream which turned the mill, also my brother's. On the other side were rich and fruitful meadows, shorn now. At the upper end of the stream was a house built of clay and oaken beams, whose side stood amidst the vines.

"That house was fair to look at yesterday, where lusty youths and maidens were gathered from the neighbouring hamlets, for it was grape-gathering time and folk from far and wide came to our help.

"Now, hearken, O King! call me not mad; speak not, or the end I may not tell. Wait not, O King, until my tale is done, but bid them now go strengthen thy strong gates, build up thy high walls." At that he turned and listened as a man who heard a doubtful noise far off; but still the King sat quiet amidst his fear of some great thing and spoke not, lest he should lose the story. Then said the man—

"How much thy power and walls may avail

thee, I know not, for I thought I heard a certain noise borne on the wind, but now I hear it not and I will speak. What said I? We fell to work gladly, and merrier grew the laugh of men and maid as the thin baskets filled. Amid all this, I had drawn near the upper end, and lonely was I, when I heard a noise that seemed like the cry of a corncrake. I listened not but worked away; then louder grew that noise, and it seemed not so like a bird now, but more like a great steel spring suddenly loosed.

"I put my basket down and turned to see the other folk. They did not heed the noise but still went on working. Louder still it seemed, as I stood there trembling. Then I turned and saw the wood like, yet unlike, what I had seen before, for as I gazed the whole sky was filled with a greenish vapour and I turned wild eyes down the hill to see what burned. My fellows were working between the vine-rows, still singing. Then I thought I was smitten with sudden sickness or coming death, and a sudden shriek rose from my companions.

"Above the wall there rose such a shape as drove all manhood from me, and I fell grovelling down. I have no words to tell what thing it was I saw. I only know that the earth seemed

to go from my feet, the sweet autumn air was filled with a faint, sickening vapour. Hearken, O King, while I try to tell thee what the thing was like. Like a lion was its head, its body goat-like, its great round eyes flamed fire, while serpent-like it hissed and circled round.

"Long I lay on that wretched day, as helpless as a dead man. When I awoke once more I gazed around with half-dead eyes; this thing is true, though thou believe it not, the land was waste and bare, burnt as with fire. As for the fair little homestead, the last flames were just dying over a grey ash-heap, the mill was gone. I knew not if my kin were slain or fled; slowly I began to move about and saw no child of man—unless indeed those ash-heaps here and there were my fellows. Down I went to the stream and sat there on the bank a long time, bewildered. At last I gathered heart and ran fast through the stream, on and on, crying, 'Are all men gone? Is there none left on earth but I alone?'

"On I ran till I came among men, and told my story. They must have brought me then to thee, O King. There is no more to say; I cannot sleep or rest, yet weary am I."

Slowly these last words came from him, his eyes all glazed and dim began to close, he tottered,

and at last sank on the ground and passed into deep sleep. They bore him away till death should reach him or returning sense.

Next, they questioned some of those who brought him. One had seen a fire the past night, and some, the morning before, had noticed a yellow smoke, one had heard the cries of burning folk, another had seen a bleeding man fly down the side of the stream, and on his flesh were dreadful marks as if done by branding irons. One, too, said he saw a dreadful serpent draw his great folded body over the way to a pool beneath the hillside, and some there were who said they had heard the sound of lions roaring, and, afraid, had watched, armed, all night with barred doors.

To the hall came more folk sorely frightened, with tales of fresh deaths and burnings.

Now Prince Bellerophon had sailed some time before, in a swift ship, against a pirate who had done great wrong against the merchantmen that sought the Lycian waters. So the King sent another captain that he held of great worth, with a company of eighty men, to see into the truth of all these things. They departed from the town at sunset, but before the next day was over, only one brave man of all that band came

back again, no weapon in his hand, no shield upon his neck, but carrying on his saddle-bow his son's dead body, a lad of eighteen winters, fair and strong.

When men asked him what thing had done the wrong, he answered not, but sat still beside the dead body as one who had no memory. When they searched the youth's body for the deadly wound, they found not one anywhere, and though the old man seemed well and sound of limb, and ate and drank what things were brought to him, he lived speechless for three more days, then went his way to the silent land.

Now a great terror fell on the city ; day by day folk came fleeing to the gates, the country-side grew waste and bare of men, and whatever armed men the King sent, they went but a little way then turned back in terror. Yet none of them knew what ill thing it was that wrought this woe.

Meanwhile men's eyes were turned to the sea watching for the return of Bellerophon in the *Seahawk*. It seemed long before the ship was seen with her pennon flying as she came toward the quay with sound of horns and singing. On the mast hung the sea-robber's shields, and from the topmast a great spear bore the

enemy's head. With joyous shout the sailors shot the gangway out to the shore, and once more as a god the wise Bellerophon was among them.

As he came into the square where the temple was, he found a great crowd had collected, and on the steps of the judgment-hall stood a gold-clad, clear-voiced herald. Over the raised heads of the listening crowd he cried aloud—

" Hearken, O Lycians, the King saith—

" ' *Upon us lies the shadow of a death I cannot deal with, I am grown old and at the best am but one man alone ; but since there are such men as may hope to cope with this unseen enemy, they shall in no wise labour for nought. So know, that to the man who ends this woe I will give my fair daughter and he shall share with me this land's rule and wealth ; or, if he rather, he shall have a noble ransom from me and be content.*' "

He ended, and the folk, seeing the sailors and men from the ship, gazed on them with mingled hope and doubt, then a shout was raised for Bellerophon as he stood silently on the edge of the crowd. He knew nothing of the terror that had fallen on the land while he had been chasing the robber-kings of the sea. Yet he could not fail to see that something grievous

was happening, such haggard eyes and such feverish faces were there before him.

So as the herald spoke, he held his breath, his heart beat fast, and in his eyes there burned the light of coming triumph, as he turned into a street that led to Jove's temple and there offered prayers before the altar.

When this was done, Bellerophon went to the King to tell him of his success on the sea. He found him pacing to and fro in his room as on the day when first he bade him fight his enemies.

"O King," said Bellerophon, "all hail to thee! the sea-thief is dead."

"And I, Bellerophon," answered the King, "have news for thee. Why hast thou come back here? I say the world is wide, and thou art young; far better it would have been for thee to have won some fair town and lived there in peace, for here with us stout heart shall win but death."

On a table near the King's right hand Bellerophon saw a casket which well he knew. By its side was a letter which he had never seen before, and, as he noted it, a half-smile came across his face, for a look of shame was in the King's eyes as they met his.

Cheerily he answered, "O King, I have been

thrown into thine hands and have shared in this city's happiness and woe. Young I am, truly, and death reaches all men, yet I know no man who knows the road that leadeth there. In my hand I hold hope, even within this gold-wrought sheath—hope, to win a noble life. But the time goes fast, and I have heard a tale from thy townsmen and mighty promises from thy herald. How sayest thou, if a man sweareth first to one and then to another, and the two cannot be kept ? "

Then the King cast down his eyes. " What sayest thou, my son ? What mysteries lie in these words of thine ? Go forth and break this evil thing that harms us, and then return and take thy due reward."

Bellerophon laughed aloud and said, " The gods are indeed kind to mortals, but thou, think of thy first vow and thy second vow ; for I shall surely come again in spite of all, and what wilt thou do then ? Ponder, meanwhile, if from ill deeds can come good to bless thee and thy kingly home."

With that he was gone, and the King, left bewildered and alone, sat down and strove to think. " Good were it," he thought, " if the next three months were past." Then he sent

for the captain of his guard and said to him, "Keep stricter watch now upon the gates for we know not what thing awaits the city; Bellerophon will go to find the truth of all these wondrous things. Bring here whatever man brings tales of woe into the city, for I would know all."

"Bellerophon will come again, my lord; for even now as he passed me by, he in no wise looked as one about to die."

"Nay," said the King, "thou speakest but of a man; can he prevail where a stout war-hardened company failed?"

"Methinks, O King, that such might even be," said the captain. "He is not of our race, nor know I whether to name him mere man or half a god, for he feareth not death, yet desire of life is hot within his heart."

"Ah," said the King, "thou lovest him, then?"

"Nay, for I fear him," answered the captain. "I should live easier if he were dead; besides, it seems to me our woes began when this godlike man first passed down our streets."

"What wouldst thou do, then, that the man might be only a glorious memory to the Lycian folk—a god, who, as he came, so he went?"

"Nay, King, what sayest thou? Hast thou forgotten where he goes this eve? Nay, hearest thou not even now his horse's hoofs ring out upon the street? Look out! look out! thine eyes shall meet his and thou shalt see the sun upon his bright armour; yet, my lord, the gold sunset only brings about the night!"

Then swiftly the King went to a window and beheld Bellerophon below with the sun shining full upon him in a glory from the west. "O great Corinthian," he cried, "happy mayst thou ride and bring us back our peace!"

The hero turned, the sunset still burned upon his golden hair. He stayed his eager horse, and round his lips there played a strange smile as he gazed up at the King, who shrank before his gaze.

The King turned and sat silent for a time beneath his captain's curious smile. "Be merry," said the man, "much lieth in the way betwixt him and life; be not too much afraid that he will come again. Happier should I be if Bellerophon, this god on earth, were gone from out our land, and well I hope he will not soon return. Who knows? But if for some reason thou dost yearn for quiet life without him, such am I who would risk great things for

great things and would try to deal with him if back again he comes. Yet, King, it might be well that I should ask for some reward to pay me for the task. If Bellerophon returns and lives, he will presently reign with thee, and, after, will sit and reign alone. I ask, then, for his share ; I am not so bold as yet to ask for thy daughter, though that indeed I may ask in time."

Into the man's twinkling, crafty eyes the King looked long. "Quick fails the day," he said ; "these things are ill to speak of in the night. Now let me rest, but to-morrow come thou to me and take my answer."

The captain bowed, and, smiling, took his leave.

Before the sun had set, the Princess went with her maids across the palace-yard towards the door of the great hall. The sunset burned like flame behind her back, and, going slowly, she heard a well-loved voice cry out some hurried word. She raised her eyes. "What dost thou, Prince, with helmet on thine head and sword girt, on this fair autumn eve ? Is it not a day too soon to leave the place thou only camest to this morn ? "

" No Lycian man can have too soon his armour on his back in this our need," said Bellerophon.

Her slim hand moved towards him. "Farewell," she said, "thou art grown a great man. Thou knowest not fear or lies, so fare thee well. If the gods keep thee not here in the world, thy memory shall live."

He took his way toward the open gate, nor once looked back.

IV

Next morn the captain held speech with the King, and when he came out from the royal palace his face wore a smile of triumph, as though the game were won. He went to the great gate and waited there for news. Many came for refuge within the walls, but nought befell that day, no tidings reached the city.

But just before the rising of the sun next morn, the gate was struck, and there sat one clad in bright armour on a grey horse. He was young and strongly built, his face seemed glad though weary. Hastily the captain spoke, "Fair fellow, speak nothing good or bad before the King hath heard thee," and the two rode on to the palace gate, which opened for them at a word. Past the warders standing half-awake they came to the King as he lay sleeping. Starting up, he

cried, "What wouldst thou? What new thing must the Lycians suffer now?"

"King," said the captain, "I have with me here a man-at-arms who seems to bear joyful tidings. Speak, good friend! the King is pleased to hear the tale thou hast to tell."

Then spoke the man: "Happiness it is to me that I can make glad the Lycian people and thee, O King. Now I and two others made up our minds to risk our lives in an attack on the dread monster that is working such evil in the land; so, in this, my father's armour, that had been charmed years ago by spells and well worn, I met the other two and forth we went at dawn two days ago. Hour by hour we heard of dreadful deaths, and met folk fleeing from this evil thing. We reached Minerva's temple, and, without delay, sought out the priests.

"They told us that their need was heavy, that day by day they dreaded death would come, and that when midnight was passed they would risk their lives no more in that house but would flee. 'Sorry cheer we have for thee, my sons,' they said, 'for all is bare and blank as some hillside, and if ye love your lives, ye will not stay another minute here.'

"The faces of these holy men were worn.

THE LOVE OF A PRINCESS

The sunset formed like flame [illegible] PAGE 54

We answered them shortly that we would stay till the morn and see what thing there might be near, and if we lived till then would seek this terror further afield. They heard us, wondering, and we being weary soon fell asleep within a room near the north wall of the great temple. Such a dream I had, O King; I dreamed I heard much people singing happily, but even amidst my dream a great voice called out in a tongue I knew not. Each face was changed to utter horror, the singing changed to shrill shrieks.

"I sat upright in bed, awake in an instant, open-mouthed with dread. All about I heard shrill screams, mixed with a roar like white flame that comes from the mouth of a furnace. The earth shook beneath my bed, and when I turned my eyes to the window, there burned such a light as would have darkened the noonday sun. There on the floor lay one of my fellows, groaning, like a wounded man, while the other circled round and round with foaming lips as one driven mad.

"I sat still for a time, trembling with fear, then I armed myself and turned to leave the place. I passed out from the temple, where, from wall to wall, there rolled a cloud of white and sulphurous smoke. Folk lay dead and dying

on the pavement. I turned my steps to the other end of that once fair place; heavier grew the smoke-cloud as I went, but I stayed not, until two fathoms only of white pavement lay between me and the grass.

"Then I saw the monster, a huge black mass, from whence came that fearful light; black and claw-like things passed from it, lengthening and shortening, and grey tufts of hair seemed moving on it. In front of me I saw an upreared dark bulk, this I knew for the monster's head, in the midst of which shone out two orbs of red flame that came and went like lights on a dark sea. There were not ten fathoms between us, and midway between me and it there lay a temple-priest, face downwards, armed, with a spear in his hand.

"As I stood motionless, striving to think how best to meet the thing, amidst the noise I heard the priest's armour ring as if smitten by some stroke, then I saw the body drawn slowly to the hideous bulk and yet I saw not what drew it, till at last it gradually passed into the huge dark mass. Quicker grew my fevered breath, and I began to waver. I opened my lips to call aloud, but made no sound. One step back I took, my sword fell from my hand, and I fell a dead heap to the earth.

"There I lay a weary time, it seemed, when in mine ears I heard a new voice. I opened my eyes and listened; close by my head a kindly voice spoke, 'Be of good cheer! the earth is earth again, and thou hadst heart enough to face the curse of Lycia, though the gods would not let thee slay it; rise up now if thou canst and help me, for I bleed.' Then my eyes grew clearer and I could see an armed man standing over me.

"I rose from the ground and gazed around; the light had gone, the night was nearly done, a cold wind blew, and the dawn strove with the low moon and the faint stars. All was quiet. That man standing beside me in the grey morning light seemed a god; he was tall and fairer than most sons of men. As our eyes met, mine, shamed and weak, dropped before his.

"'Be not ashamed,' he said, 'but look around and thou shalt see thy fear dead on the ground.' Then I saw a tangled mass of hair and scale and claw wallowing in the grey down-trodden grass. I could not see clearly the monster's shape in that dim light, and gladly did I turn away from the dreadful sight. Facing my companion, I said, 'Who art thou?'

"'I am a man,' he said, 'even as thou art. Some god gave to me such strength that, by this

my father's sword, have I brought deliverance to the Lycians. But let us come again when day is grown and I have eased the burning pain of thirst that chokes me, and when thine hands have bound my wounds with linen bands, for I grow faint!'

"So we passed between the pillars till we reached the room where I had slept. There we drank, and I bathed his wounds. The day showed us our friends dead on the pavement, yet without a wound. We went out to where the monster lay slantwise on the wind-swept grass. I gathered heart and touched the carcase. Lo! how it had changed! Nothing was there now but skin and scales and dreadful hair drawn tight about the bones; flesh and muscle had ebbed away with life; its head, deep-cleft by the hero's sword, had left in it three teeth like spears, the rest had fallen to the ground. For a minute we stood wondering, until my companion said to me—

"'In the past night thou didst valiantly, so smite off the head, and then go and show this finished work unto the King, and tell him by that token that I come, who before have had no quiet home either in Corinth or the Argive land. I stay here till to-morrow.' He seemed weary

and spoke as one who dreamed. I dared not disobey, so smote the head from off the trunk and humbly bade farewell to my deliverer.

"I took my horse and bound the monster's head to the saddle, and with merry heart made for this city. But before I had gone far a weariness came over me, and, holding still the reins in my right hand, I lay down upon the sunburnt grass of the roadside. It was moonrise when I woke again, my horse grazed close beside with dangling rein, but when I called him and he turned to me I could see no burden on his back.

"Firmly had I bound the thing, so I searched around, but nothing could I see of that grim head, only a line of grey ashes I could trace from place to place as the wandering beast had fed.

"So my tale is done, and though I have no token to show to thee, yet doubt not, O King, that no more will the land be vexed with this ill torment. Further, if he who did this deed is no god, he will be here soon, so thou must devise, O Lycian King, how best to reward him. For me, I pray that thou wilt give me to him from to-day, that, serving him, I may become his like."

The King and captain gazed at each other

for a little while; an ugly smile lurked round the captain's mouth, but the King stared blankly on him. The man who brought the news stared at them both with knitted brows, greatly marvelling why they spoke not, until at last the King turned his eyes on him, but it was the captain who spoke—

"Truly, O King, I know no one to do this deed except Bellerophon, and though the reward thou hast promised is of such wondrous worth, yet it is not too much for such a sword, for such a heart, for the people's friend."

At last the King spoke. "We doubt thee not, thy tale seems true, nor dost thou glorify thyself in it. So here thou shalt stay till we see him who did this deed; then thou shalt have a good reward as one both true and brave. But now, this tale of thine that began well and went on clearly, has not told us plainly the shape of what thou didst behold."

"No," said the man; "when I stood beside it, I thought its likeness would stay in my mind for ever; but now what shall I say? Hast thou not heard, O King, that it was three-formed? lion-like in front, goat-like in the middle, with a dragon's scaly tail. But memory has gone from me; content thee, King, with what I have

told, for when I try to behold its image my heart grows faint. Hearken, what draws nigh ?" for from outside there arose a joyous shout and a well-known word, the name "Bellerophon !"

The King arose and dressed. "Go, captain," said he, "set the King Bellerophon without delay upon the royal throne, and tell him that I come to make my prayer that since I have sat there alone for a long time and know no other trade than that of King, he will of his bounty yet add a thing to all that he hath given and let me reign along with him."

So his lips spoke, but his eyes seemed to say, "Long is it to the ending of the day and many things may happen before eventide."

The captain went, and found eager people flocking round the door of the great hall. Inside, near the dais, stood Bellerophon ; the morning sun shone on his bright arms as he answered the eager questions of the people. Suddenly his eyes fell on his late friend.

"Has the King seen the head ?" he asked eagerly of him. "Knows he what it means ? for behold ! before the sun had set on the place where thou leftest me, all that heap thou sawest there was gone, hair and flesh and bone. So when I mounted my good steed this dawn I looked to

thee to show the token of that deed, lest all should seem a pretence or a dream."

"Master," the other said, "even as thy tale must mine be told, and nothing is left to show of that dread thing."

As he spoke the crowd parted right and left to make way for the King. A blare of silver trumpets shook the roof. Then said the captain, "The King needs no more proof to show that thou hast done this glorious deed. Be glad, thy day is come, and all is well!"

Bellerophon stood with bent head listening to the joyful shouts of the people. Then silence filled the hall and he heard a soft voice close to him say, "Look up, look up, the days have brought sweet end to our desires, and made thee mine."

He raised his eyes. There she stood, her sweet lips trembling, as she reached out her hand to him in greeting. He took it within his own strong ones and said, "What hour is this that brings so fair a thing to crown my bliss? How shall I know that such a thing is true?"

Then the King cried, "All happiness, Corinthian! Thou hast not died. The land holds no joy like thou shalt have if yet the gods will save thy life awhile; yet mayst thou

fear, for thou art such, that the gods will have thee play thy part in heaven and not on earth. But come now and see if this my throne is too low for thy great heart; sit here with me to-day, and on the morrow wed my daughter and live thy life hereafter."

He spoke smilingly, and yet a troubled look broke across the would-be frankness of his smile. The hero stood and watched the Princess as she turned and went down the hall, then he spoke, "O King, I take from thee my due reward, but still for thee my hand shall hold the sword, nor will I claim more than thou givest me although I am a King's son."

So Bellerophon was set on the throne and the royal crown placed on his head, yet in his heart there dwelt no sense of safety.

V

The noisy day was ended, in the royal palace the revellers had passed to their sleeping rooms, and all was still.

The Princess lay for some time upon her bed, and as sleep would not come to her, she rose and stood close to the window. The night was cloudy, with promise of rain. "I will go to

Minerva's shrine," she whispered, "and pray." She turned, softly took a dusky cloak, and passed through the door. Her white feet fell lightly on the floor, her soft garments made no rustling sound as she took her way to the goddess' shrine.

Silently but with quick steps she went, pausing every now and then to listen. The temple stood in an open space, bordered with olive trees. A marble path some ten yards long led to its door. There she stayed and watched the trees swaying in the night breeze. Suddenly she heard the clashing of arms and the sound of footsteps. From behind a pillar she saw a tall, dark figure come from out the trees and draw near the temple.

The moon came out from behind a cloud and its light fell on a bright steel helmet. She trembled and crept closer in her hiding-place. Then, though now the moon was dull, she clearly saw ten shapes of armed men steal up the steps into the temple.

Without more delay she caught up her gown and with swift feet reached the dark side of the brass temple door, and through its chink she saw the ten armed men standing on the marble floor.

A voice she knew was calling over names, and

each man answered, "Here" or "Yea" in a voice harsh and low. Then the man she knew went on—

"No one is missing,—ye know why we are met here, few words are best to-night. Within the ivory room lies Bellerophon, most likely sleeping, or at the worst without a sword to strike or a shield to ward. So our work is light, yet let those who lack heart even at this hour go back." He ceased, and low muttered words seemed to say, "We are ready." Then the voice went on—

"When he is slain, then shall ye bear his bed into this shrine and burn what can be burned, but into the deep sea thou, the Clearer of the Shore, with thy two men, shalt bear his body. Fellows, what say we then when, on the morn, the city wakes to find its deliverer gone? This: 'Men are fools and blind, and the gods all-wise; this man, born on earth by some strange chance, was of too great worth to live; therefore the gods, who set him work to do, when that was done, took him hence and crowned him with immortality. Nor may we hope to see his body; these ashes of the web on which last lay his god-like limbs are left for certain signs,—so shall ye build a temple to him near the gate, and bear gifts of

good things unto the one who brought deliverance to you.' Fellows! spread well this tale that I tell. Come, then, the night is changing, dawn's first glimmer must not find us here."

The door was opened wide, and one by one they stole down the steps and made their way to the ivory room.

But the Princess, fair-footed, tender-limbed, where was she? As soon as she heard the name and place they spoke of, she stayed to hear no more, but silently moved from the cold brass door and stole swiftly away.

Panting, she entered the ivory room, to find his men asleep. With haste she took from off the wall his sword, shield and spear, coat-of-mail and helmet, and drew near the bed. With a light hand she pressed his brow, he started upright beneath her touch.

"Speak not," cried she, "but listen, and save thy life for my sake. Thy foes are on thee! Make no more delay. Now I go, I have done my part."

Quickly she passed out. Bellerophon rose and armed himself, and hastily caught up his weapons, turning round to see what help was near, but his men were asleep on the floor. He took his stand upon the bed, poised the well-

steeled spear in his right hand, and waited, listening.

Footfalls of stealthy men came nearer; he had no fear, his breath came steadily, he nearly smiled. He heard the light latch raised, and saw the door move. It swung back on its well-oiled hinges—silence for a little space. Then a cry burst from his lips, and through the room rang a shriek of fear and a great clang of falling arms.

His foes lay across the threshold, their leader slain, while some hung wavering by the door, afraid. As they stood there, across the winds came the sound of a long blast from a great horn, hoarse, loud, and long. They fled this way and that, leaving Bellerophon standing at his door in scorn. When he saw the face of the man he had slain he knew it for the captain's.

He sheathed his sword and made for the great door, where now were gathered the awakened folk, men armed and unarmed, children and old men; all had heard the horn which, under pain of death, no one might wind except to bring help to the King in trouble.

As he entered the hall, a slim, close-mantled figure came to him and said, "Go forth and speak, dear heart. All men call on you; say to

them that all is well. It was I who wound the horn to bring thee aid."

Bellerophon mounted the platform and looked down upon the tumult. "What will ye, good men, that ye make this night more noisy than the day? What will ye do? Speak out one of you, that we may rest."

A man stood forth, clad in bright armour. "Surely we thought some horror had been done, because we seemed to hear the horn."

Then said the hero, "Masters, perchance ye dreamed, nor dreamed alone, for I dreamed too that armed men beset my door to take my life, and when I passed the threshold even now, it seemed to me a man new slain lay there. Go again to your beds, my masters; to-morrow comes when ye praise the gods for your saved homes, and rejoice with me in my happiness."

He ceased, and a great shout rent the dawn as one by one they went back to their homes.

When Bellerophon came to his own door, the captain's body was gone and his drugged men were waking. He lay down and slept till the bright sun brought in the day.

He woke fresh and joyous, and clad himself in gold and royal robes, with neither sword nor spear. He reached the great hall and sat on

the ivory throne, receiving gifts from hunters and merchants and sailors. Still he wondered why the other King came not.

Before the morn was ended, a man brought to him the casket that once his own hands had carried, and said, "The King bids thee take what lies therein, O King Bellerophon, and prays that since thine office doth begin to-day, that thou wouldst judge if the man did so utterly wrong to strive to keep his oath. He bids thee say whether thou wilt now accept what he gave unto thee yesterday, and if so, then taking it, thou wilt forget the memories of the past year."

King Bellerophon looked down and drew a letter from the casket that he knew so well, opened it and read—

"*The King of Argos to the King of Lycia, sendeth greeting. Dost thou remember when I saved thee from the lions? then I had one gift from thee which has not made me glad, thy daughter. Another thing thou gavest me then—an oath to do my bidding once, even if loathsome to thee. Now keep thine oath and slay the man who bears this —once my friend. This Bellerophon is one who seemeth kinder than most men, just and far-seeing, brave in those times when men's hearts grow sick*

with fear. Such is he, and yet a monster! So take him and in forefront of battle let him fall, or speared by some foeman if may be. Such counsel to thee, friend, I give; but happy mayst thou dwell as thou shalt keep thy faith."

Bellerophon raised his head and to the messenger said, "Say to the King that I think he did right to try and keep his oath, but say that all is well, that I will take the gift he gave to me, and in taking, forget all."

The man went and left Bellerophon thinking of the days gone by. Presently, a strain of merry music made him lift his head, and, like a flame, joy wrapped him round as now she came to him, his promised reward, the one thing on earth he most desired, won at last.

XII

THE MAIDEN'S VOW

In the month of May in days of old a certain youth, well-made, young, wise, and bold, landed on a little island in the Grecian seas. He wandered about with no fixed intent till he came to a fair garden, where he sat beneath the trees idly dreaming.

Presently a strain of music and singing reached his ears, and through half-shut eyes he noted a company of white-armed maidens drawing near, walking in order as if intent upon some serious work.

What was it that pierced his heart and made him rise quickly ? How was it that his eyes had caught her eyes alone, that the others were but images ? Why must he feel so lonely when she was gone ? In his heart was a picture of one among that band of maidens, kind-eyed and gentle, who had looked sweetly at him.

From the garden he went at last, and passed through the noble town and saw its wonders and heard its stories. But when night came on and men slept, his case seemed piteous, darkness helped him not. From wall to wall Acontius turned his weary eyes till the daylight burned in the east. He rose and went to the garden, the tulips flamed in the grey light of dawn and the dew lay on the grass.

Acontius paced that spot of ground, restless with wild thoughts, while round about the white-thorn shed sweet fragrance.

Now with a great sigh he saw the yellow sun-beams flit across the wet grass as day smiled on the world. He raised his eyes and turned. His heart stopped awhile, for there, against a flowering thorn-bush, he saw his heart's desire standing among the tulips. Clad in grey she was, her hair drawn by a silken band from her white neck, and in her hand she held a myrtle-spray. She raised her eyes and looked around till she saw his astonished eyes fixed on her.

In silence they stood with faces changed by love. So near she was that she could see the trembling of his lips. Then, standing there amazed, he saw the tulips bow before her as she made a half-step unto him with a glad cry, and,

half afraid, he stretched out his arms. She came, and together they walked among the flowers.

Then drew near the sound of men, loud laughing and talking, and with fear in her eyes she left him.

Time wore away, day after day passed, when one noon Acontius was standing in the garden and a fisherman, an old man and poor, came near and greeted him.

"Thou dost well to stand here, my son, since thy stay in this city will soon be done, for thou shalt see each day at noon a company of all our fairest maids draw nigh. Each day they go to one who can best tell them how to serve the dreadful goddess. They should be here now. Behold they come!"

The old man pointed to the gate through which came the company of maidens. Acontius turned towards them and beheld her, like the morning star amid the weary stars of night. In the middle of the band was she, clad in a gown of blue, decked with fresh May flowers. With one hand she touched a flower lovingly, the other held an ivory harp strung with gold.

Presently she turned her head and saw him, her lids drooped, and over her face a bright flush came, then without another look she passed him by.

He turned away from the place; slower and slower the hours dragged by. Suddenly he turned and fled along the sands, nor stopped till he reached a long cove with a sandy beach. Between the yellow strand and the cliff was built a cottage white and low, and by it stood a fisherman whose grey hood covered white locks. Acontius drew near, for he knew the man to be the same who told him of the coming of the maidens.

The old man greeted him and fell to talk of fortune, waves and winds, and changing days, and Acontius told him of his desire to remain in the island, unknown, if the kindly fisherman would give him room in his cottage.

So there awhile he dwelt, thinking of his love from dewy dusk to sunny morn. One evening the old man began to tell when the great feast to Diana should come to pass, and then spoke of the fair maiden Acontius loved.

"Indeed," he said, "this sweet Cydippe hath great need of one to save her life from woe, because at next August her folk, to win Diana's favour, are giving her to the service of the goddess; honoured of all folk certainly will she be, but unwed all her days."

Acontius began to pace the room, and with

curious face the old man gazed at him, but said nothing.

Night after night he lay sleepless upon his bed, striving to think what he could do to win the maiden.

So the time drew on to the day when all hope must be cast away. The night before, he gave what wealth he had to the old fisherman and bade him farewell, then crept to his bed, but his weary head tossed on the pillow. At daybreak he arose and went wearily from the door. Beneath an apple tree he lay down, the fruit hung heavy on the boughs above him, and here and there upon the grass lay a golden apple.

Sore weary, Acontius was soon asleep and dreaming of unseen singers, and then strange thoughts entered his dream. He seemed to see the Goddess of Love draw towards him and touch his face. With the touch he awoke and sighed. Beneath the ancient tree, close by his hand, lay an apple, great, smooth, and golden. Dreamily he turned it over and with a long, sharp thorn he slowly wrote upon its side these words—

"*Acontius will I wed to-day.*"

Then, glancing stealthily around, he went with hurried steps to the town, where joyous

folk were wending their way to the temple, and thither too Acontius went. Coming there, he stood near the altar, and with haggard eyes gazed upon the image of the goddess.

In a while the rites began. Acontius heard the curved horns blow that heralded the coming of the damsels who walked in front of Cydippe.

Time passed, a great rush of pain stopped all his blood, he stood blinded and tottering. Slowly she came near to the place where he was standing, and her face turned to him, her steadfast eyes met his. Her face was pale, her eyes mournful beneath her thin veil. There by her side stood her mother, tall, fair, and noble, but with a proud look on her stern face now, as she thought of the honour she would win in making her daughter a priestess of Diana.

There on the first step of the altar Cydippe stood, so loved, so loved in vain. Her mother had fallen a little way back from her, yet eager to hear the first word of that dreadful vow.

With slow foot Cydippe moved to the last step. Acontius spoke not, but, without a sound, cast the apple into the folds of her gown. Once more she stayed while a flush came over her sweet face. A whisper went round, for some had noticed the apple fall into her gown.

Acontius trembled with hope and fear as her mother hastened up to her side. Casting aside both fear and shame, Cydippe walked to the altar and laid upon it the golden fruit, fixing her eyes upon the marble image as though imploring love and pity.

Her mother hastened to her with troubled eyes. "What hast thou there?" Acontius heard her say. "Is the vow made? I heard no word that thou hast said."

Then her sweet voice answered, "No word I spoke for good or ill, but this spoke for me. Say ye what vow is written here, although indeed I wrote it not. In my heart this morn I had no thought of anything but swearing myself to the service of the goddess, forlorn of love and hope; but now, I will not throw my life into your deep-dug spice-strewn grave. I will keep the vow written upon that golden fruit."

Silence fell on the place as the mother took in her hand the fated fruit and read the words. Speedily she left the altar to tell the wondering priests what had befallen. In low words they spoke together; some counselled that the maiden should keep to the writing laid upon the altar, while others thought death should be her punishment. But from the crowd arose great

murmuring when they heard the story, and such god-sent joy fell on all hearts there, that when some cried out that the priests had mind to slay the lovers, a fierce shout rent the autumn air—

"Nay, wed the twain, love willeth it!"

Silently the priests stood by, till one said, "Fear not, the whole land, not we, take back what they once gave."

"Yea, let it be," said the next; "ye deem it a little thing that two hearts should cling each to each till two are one." As he spoke a red spot burned in his cheek and his eyes glittered, for behold! close by the altar of gold there stood the weary ones at last, with arms cast about each other, and all seemed good; nor have I heard that aught of evil ever befell them.

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